Framing the Text: The *Year 2000* in British Columbia

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This paper presents an analysis of the text, intertext, and subtext of the *Year 2000* document, a comprehensive statement of policies and objectives for education in British Columbia issued by the Ministry of Education in 1990. Examination of the relationships between the text and intertext of the *Year 2000* reveals a subtext that fundamentally contradicts the stated objectives of the document itself. Rather than encouraging the development of students' individuality, as the text of the *Year 2000* document frequently advocates, its subtext reveals an educational agenda that would maintain social stability and economic prosperity at the expense of students' individuality. The impossibility of a text imposing such control is discussed.

Cet article présente une analyse du texte, de l'"intertexte" et du "sous-texte" de *Year 2000,* un document préparé en 1990 par le ministère de l'Éducation de la Colombie-Britannique et dans lequel sont énoncées de façon détaillée ses politiques et objectifs pédagogiques. L'examen des relations entre le texte et l'intertexte révèle un sous-texte qui contredit fondamentalement les objectifs énoncés dans le document lui-même. Plutôt que d'encourager l'épanouissement de l'individualité des élèves, comme le prône à maintes reprises le texte de *Year 2000,* le sous-texte révèle un programme éducatif qui maintient la stabilité sociale et la prospérité économique aux dépens de l'individualité des élèves.

In May 1990, the Ministry of Education of the Province of British Columbia published the *Year 2000* document. In the words of the then Minister of Education, this document was to describe "the broad principles, characteristics and policies toward which all educational activities should strive" (p. v) in future educational planning in the province. This paper does not analyze the *Year 2000* document from the perspective of the organizational structures it proposes or the program descriptions it contains, but rather as a piece of discourse exhibiting a text, an intertext, and a subtext. The analysis leads to conclusions about the stability of texts and the possibilities of their influence.

TEXT, INTERTEXT, AND SUBTEXT

The notion of "text" is relatively straightforward. For example, Brown and Yule (1983) in their discussion of discourse define a text as "the verbal

record of a communicative act" (p. 6). Similarly, Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) define a text as "a communicative occurrence" (p. 3). It is this characteristic of a text, its existence as a communicative act or occurrence, that identifies a piece of discourse as a text. As Brown and Yule (1983) have put it, a text is "evidence of an attempt by a producer (speaker/writer) to communicate his message to a recipient (speaker/reader)" (p. 24). The *Year 2000* document fits this description of text well: its intent is clearly communicative — to articulate for others educational policy.

However, any text exists in a condition of intertextuality, of reference to other texts that, although constraining it, also make it possible. No text exists alone. In the discourse community of which it is a member, any text exists in a constant state of multiple references to other texts. It is through these references that a text takes on its identity. Foucault (1972) has put the notion of intertextuality this way:

> The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. (p. 165)

But the question arises as to where this intertextuality ends. Logically speaking, if every text exists in reference to other texts and these texts themselves exist in reference to still other texts, intertextuality is endless, and no text can be examined independently of all others. This condition produces what Derrida (1977) has described as a "break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (p. 185).

Derrida (1979b) addressed this illimitability in his notion of the *parergon,* the concept of framing the text. To analyze a text, Derrida argues, "we must know what we are talking about" (p. 12): the text must be identified, made to stand still — the process of its seemingly limitless referral must be arrested, albeit arbitrarily and artificially, if the text is to be isolated as a separate entity in the matrix of intertextuality of which it is a part. Through the act of framing this arrest is achieved. As Culler (1983) has put it, framing a text can be regarded as "an interpretive imposition that restricts an object by establishing boundaries" (p. 196). Establishment of these boundaries holds the text constant for the purpose of analysis within the unending flux of its intertextuality.

However, once established, these boundaries tend to disappear. The frame, rather than simply circumscribing the text, becomes both a boundary around the text and a part of the text contained within the boundary. For this reason, Derrida (1979b) contends "there is framing, but the frame does not exist" (p. 39). Derrida (1979a) elaborates this notion in his discussion of what he terms "invagination" (p. 97), the process by which, through its folding in on the text, the frame becomes indistinguishable from the text. Through invagination, what was once perceived to be exterior to the text

becomes interior to it; what was once peripheral becomes central. While the intertext may have first seemed to exist on the margins of the text, it now can be found at its centre, part of the text itself.

Framing a text within its intertext reveals its subtext. Eagleton (1983) describes the subtext of a novel, for instance, as "a text which runs within it, visible at certain 'symptomatic' points of ambiguity, evasion or overemphasis, and which we as readers are able to 'write' even if the novel itself does not" (p. 178). Through its subtext, therefore, a text reveals its possibilities of meaning, possibilities which may be denied by what it appears to communicate. In this sense, as Dranch (1983) puts it, the subtext consists of "the clearly stated unsaid, or more precisely of the inter-said [*inter-dit*: forbidden]" (p. 177). Yet this unsaid is often central to the text's meaning; it is what the text intends to say but prevents itself from saying. In this way, as Eagleton (1983) argues, the subtext reveals the "unconscious" (p. 178) of the text, the manner in which the text "is not quite identical with itself" (p. 179). It is as if the text reveals fault lines, fissures on its surface which, if traced to the centre, illuminate the subtext lying beneath its surface. Where these fault lines appear — at these points of disjunction, rupture, and stress — the inconsistencies, contradictions, evasions, and obfuscations of the text show themselves, however unwillingly, as clues to a meaning which the text forbids itself, at least on its surface.

THE YEAR 2000: ITS TEXT, INTERTEXT, AND SUBTEXT

The most prominently displayed portion of the text of the *Year 2000* document is what it calls the "Mission Statement" for education in British Columbia. Printed in large, boldface type on a separate page immediately following the title page, the statement reads as follows:

> The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy. (p. ii)

The central themes of this statement — the development of students' individuality and the maintenance of social order and economic prosperity — reverberate throughout the document. However, it is through the contradictions and inconsistencies that emerge between these two themes, and the fault lines in the text that these contradictions and inconsistencies reveal, that the subtext of the *Year 2000* can be seen within the context of its intertext.

The Text

The declared intent of the *Year 2000* is to provide a broad policy description "for all program development, student assessment and evaluation, and

reporting activities" (p. v) throughout the province of British Columbia. Echoing its "Mission Statement," the document states that "the central aim of both provincial and local policies and programs is to enable learners in the school system to be the best they can be, both as individuals and as contributing members of society and the economy" (p. 1). But, as the text of the *Year 2000* unfolds, there appears a dislocation in its consistency, a rupture in its logic. Despite frequent mention of the need for schools to develop students' individuality through the encouragement of their critical thinking, creativity, and flexibility, the development of this individuality is constantly subordinated to the need to maintain social stability and economic prosperity. This emphasis is clear in the definition of what the document establishes as an "educated citizen," one who is "skilled and able to contribute to society generally, including the world of work (in order to help support the society and economy)," and who is "aware of the rights and prepared to exercise the responsibilities of an individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world (in order to ensure the improvement of society and the economy)" (pp. 3–4). In the *Year 2000,* individuals are placed in opposition to the societal and economic expectations held for them. Although there is no necessary incompatibility between the development of students' individuality and the maintenance of social and economic stability, by linking these two themes as it does, the *Year 2000,* rather than harmonizing them, renders them discordant. In this way, a fundamental rupture in the text occurs.

This rupture is further revealed in the treatment of student assessment. "Assessment" is defined in highly behaviouristic terms as "the systematic process of gathering evidence of what the child can do" (p. 8). Its methods are "to include all the procedures used to synthesize the collected information for the purpose of describing and categorizing student learning performance" (pp. 8–9). Midway through their school years, all students are to be given "a realistic assessment" (p. 26) in terms of how their performance up to that point has prepared them for "the successful completion" (p. 26) of the various program options that lie ahead. Moreover, student learning in the upper years of school is to be reported using "the symbols (A, B, C, . . .) indicated in Minister of Education Orders" (p. 28), and all provincial assessment information is to be reported consistently (p. 11). Evidence thus gathered is seen to provide "information that learners, and their parents, need in order to make informed choices about directions for future learning, and that teachers and counsellors need in order to provide advice" (p. 11) about students' future educational and vocational choices. Moreover, all students will write common government examinations at the conclusion of their schooling. In all of this, assessment can be seen as the means by which schools are to regulate students in their progress toward the social and economic agenda in the *Year 2000* document. Despite its frequently stated concern with students' individual development, the *Year 2000* sets out a

pervasive and structured system of monitoring student progress that denies recognition of this individuality.

The Intertext

For the purpose of this analysis, the *Year 2000* document will be framed within the intertextuality of those documents that directly preceded its announcement, that accompanied it, that have followed it, and that have been overtly linked to it. Although this, like any act of framing, is arbitrary, it is also necessary if the *Year 2000* is to be held constant for examination within its illimitable intertextual space.

The most prominent component of the *Year 2000*'s intertext is the *Report of the Royal Commission on Education,* released in August 1988. Given a broad mandate "to inquire into and . . . report on education in the Province from kindergarten through grade 12" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 3), the Commission was established in March 1987 and headed by Barry Sullivan, a lawyer. The *Report* revealed two overriding concerns. The first was a perception of dramatic change in the society and economy of British Columbia, and the second was a questioning of the place and function of schools within this climate of change. Regarding the society and economy of British Columbia, the *Report* displays an anxious preoccupation with the future in terms of what it perceives to be a fundamentally changing present. Speaking of students already in schools, the *Report* expresses an abiding concern for "what values and traditions we preserve, what ideas and knowledge we will hold, and, ultimately, what we as a society and as a province represent" (p. 7) when these students reach adulthood. The *Report* constantly refers to specific changes including the impact of shifting employment patterns as the province moves from a resource-based to a technological economy; the economic, political, and social implications of British Columbia's geographical location on the Pacific Rim; the effects of immigration; and the decline of the family as a social unit. The Commission concluded that "British Columbia is in the midst of a profound and, some would argue, radical shift in the foundations of its economic and social life" (p. 34).

This conclusion led the Commission to focus on the social function of schools. This, in turn, raised what is referred to as "the school mandate issue" (p. 8), the question of what schools should be doing and what schools cannot be expected to do. In reviewing what they interpret to be the broad range of diverse and essentially non-educational social functions schools have recently come to provide, the Commission concluded that "imposing such responsibilities on schools . . . has generally obscured their primary function as institutions for learning and, in turn, has led to questions about their general educational effectiveness" (p. 8). The Commissioners responded by recommending that the mandate of schools be narrowed to one that is "educational in nature and . . . preserved as such" (p. 8). They argued that "to expect the school to satisfy all but the most severe social and develop-

mental needs of the young is to weaken, in fundamental ways, its ability to discharge its primary educational objectives" (p. 72).

These objectives were not neutrally conceived, however. The *Report* refers to students as "human resources," whose education is to be "free from the weight of conflict and uncertainty" (p. 220). In achieving this end, schools are seen as parts of "a system that seeks to protect the public good through structures and processes designed to ensure that certain standards are maintained, certain skills and bodies of knowledge are learned, and certain protections are afforded youngsters, parents, teachers, school personnel, and the community in general" (p. 220). In the *Report* of the Royal Commission, this theme of protection—of an anxious concern that schools help to preserve what seemed to be the immutable social and economic stability of the past as a changing present—was portrayed as a movement into an uncertain future. That theme, central to its own text, contributed significantly to the intertext of the *Year 2000* document.

Other texts reflecting this theme followed the release of the Royal Commission's *Report*. In an address to the British Columbia School Trustees Association on 27 January 1989, the Minister of Education announced that "Government sees very clearly the link between education and the social and economic health of the province" (Brummet, 1989c, p. 3). That same day, two Minister's Papers were tabled in the provincial legislature and described in an accompanying news release as showing "the high priority which Government has given to education" (Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 1). In the first of these papers, *Mandate for the School System* (Brummet, 1989a), the Minister introduced the Ministry of Education's "Mission Statement," now a frontispiece in all government documents having to do with the *Year 2000* and prominently displayed in the Ministry's two most recent annual reports (1990a, 1991). In *Policy Directions* (Brummet, 1989b), the Minister clearly stated that the school curriculum "will focus on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners will need in order to develop their potential and to contribute to society and the economy in the future" (p. 10). And, in anticipation of the emphasis on assessment in the *Year 2000,* this same document also announced that in the schools of British Columbia "there will be increased emphasis on regular assessment of student performance" (p. 15).

So it was that the intertextual framework for the *Year 2000* document was established. Beginning with the Royal Commission's anxious perception of fundamental changes in British Columbia's society and economy, and the narrowed mandate for education that it set down in response to this perception, and continuing through the subsequent ministerial documents relating to the *Year 2000,* clear anticipations of the shape and substance of the *Year 2000* appear. Schools are to be instruments for maintaining social stability and economic prosperity, and the individuality of the learner is to be subordinated to this objective as the learner's progress toward the acquisition of the skills and abilities required for the achievement of the social and economic agenda of the *Year 2000* are pursued. Moreover, this

progress is to be monitored through a comprehensive and pervasive program of assessment.

The Subtext

The subtext of the *Year 2000* displays itself, however reluctantly, by means of what Derrida has called "grafts" on the surface of its text, points of contact between its text and its intertext. Derrida (1982) posits grafting as a metaphor for the mechanism by which texts expose themselves through their relations with other texts. Where grafts occur, fissures, fault lines, and ruptures in the text reveal its subtext. Through these "textual grafts" (Derrida, 1982, p. 202), text and intertext are invaginated. At points of intertextual joining, a text reveals itself and submits to a reading not of what it "says" on its surface, but of what it fears saying, what it forbids itself to say, but what at the same time it betrays itself by saying through its subtext.

The relationships between the text of the *Year 2000* document and those other texts that form its intertext are better conceived as synchronic rather than diachronic. Although the various texts that make up the intertext of the *Year 2000* appeared linearly through time, they graft themselves onto the *Year 2000,* and, at their points of contact, are invaginated within it so as to co-exist with it rather than relate to it chronologically. Through grafts, these texts become part of the *Year 2000* at any given moment in its time, irrespective of their time-ordered relationships to it. The *Year 2000* thus is a composite text built from its synchronic relationships with its intertext. And through these relationships, revealed by their grafts, and the fissures and fault lines they leave on the text at their points of stress, of disrupted continuity, of ill-fitting forms and structures, and of contradiction, the subtext begins to appear.

The anxious concern with maintenance of social and economic stability that characterizes the *Report* of the Royal Commission, and the narrowed mandate for education that this anxiety produced, constitutes the dominant graft onto the text of the *Year 2000* document, a graft reinscribed repeatedly by the other documents that make up its intertext, and one through which its subtext is revealed. Although the text of the *Year 2000* espouses enfranchising learners by acknowledging their individuality, its subtext reveals a highly structured, regulated, and controlled education system wherein student progress toward narrowly conceived educational goals is monitored through a pervasive system of assessment that categorizes students according to their future roles as workers in support of a stable society and a sustained economy. Students are not to be "streamed"—in fact, the document resolutely denies this intention, arguing that "it is important that learners are able to leave their options open" (p. 17). Yet the reporting of student achievement is to be conducted so parents and students, under the influence of students' counsellors, develop "realistic" (p. 26) program plans. Moreover, this reporting is to be standardized throughout the province, and, in the senior

grades, it is to use a system of letter grades. Students are thus to be described and categorized in terms of their proper place in a society where, despite overt textual gestures toward individuality and individual learning, all is aimed at maintaining stability and economic prosperity.

Rather than being a liberal agenda for education, one wherein the individuality of the learner is recognized and learners are in fact encouraged to be "the best they can be," the subtext of the *Year 2000* reveals a highly repressive document, one that runs counter to the very notions of individuality and empowerment it espouses. If, as Frank Lentricchia argues, "society should be a function of education" (cited in Johnson, 1987, p. 25), then Lentricchia's argument is betrayed by the *Year 2000* document. Rather than permitting changes in the social and economic stratification of society, through education the *Year 2000* seeks to conserve a static social order and an economy which supports this order. The *Year 2000* represents a movement from the expressed anxiety of the Royal Commission report to a determined attempt to impose a paternalistic notion of social and economic security on British Columbia through its school system and the assessment program embodied within this system. Its interdiction is therefore against itself: its subtext forbids what its text states, and it is through the machinations of its intertext grafted onto its text that this subtext is revealed.

DISCUSSION

Tuen van Dijk (1987) has described discourse as being "about objects or people, about their properties and relations, about events or actions, or about complex episodes of these, that is, about some fragment of the world which we call a situation" (p. 161). This description takes discourse beyond the confines of itself and inserts it into the world. Without such a context, language disappears, it refers to nothing, its possibilities of meaning cease to exist. Bakhtin (1981) has made this point in arguing that "the sign can never be separated from the social situation without relinquishing its nature as sign" (p. 95).

This notion of the social inscription of text, the manner in which its meaning is realized in use, has come to dominate contemporary thinking about interpretation. Stanley Fish (1980, 1989), for instance, in denying the objectivity of the text, posits the notion of "interpretive communities." These are communities of like-minded readers who, rather than finding similar meanings in texts, approach texts with a communal set of expectations about meaning which they then read to confirm. As Fish (1976) puts it, interpretive communities are "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (p. 171). In this formulation, meaning is made by readers, not found in texts. Moreover, meaning is a function of the social context within which interpretation takes place.

Interpretation considered in this way reintroduces the notion of framing. Barthes (1977) refers to a text as "that social space which leaves no language safe" (p. 158). Although framing the text is to make it stand still within its intertext, arresting its movement in the intertextual space of which it is part, framing itself is never innocent. Framing involves using socially determined discretionary moves, and for this reason the act of framing is an integral element of the construction of meaning. As Culler (1988) has put it, frames are "mechanisms of signification" (p. vii); they are mechanisms by which interpretive space is both delimited and defined. But what is included and what is left out result from interpretive acts of the reader: it is the reader as a member of an interpretive community who determines the intertextual boundaries that are established as well as the meaning specified within these boundaries.

It is tempting to impose a Marxist frame on the text of the *Year 2000.* In its apparent linkage of education with the maintenance of a bourgeois social order and the economy by which this order is sustained, through the categorization of students in terms of their anticipated social and economic utility, the *Year 2000* could be framed as a document in the class struggle. Such a frame can be taken from Apple (1988), for example:

> Schools assist in the process of capital accumulation by providing some of the necessary conditions for recreating an unequally responsive economy. They do this in part through their internal sorting and selecting of students by "talent," thus — through their integration into a credential market and a system of urban segregation — roughly reproducing a hierarchically organized labor force. (p. 193)

But this is a frame-up (as are all acts of framing, including the one being practised here). It limits the interpretation of the text to a particular stance, a limited set of moves, and it demands membership in one particular interpretive community to do this — in the case of Apple, the community made up of fellow Marxists. Moreover, it ends there — it produces a closed text, a sense of certitude, of having "figured it out."

But it is not as simple as this. The subtext of the *Year 2000* document reveals, if nothing else, the ideational volatility of its text. This volatility and the insecurity it produces prevent closure. Instead of standing still within any one frame, through its encounters with different readers representing different interpretive communities, a text constantly tests the boundaries of any frame within which it is placed. For this reason, as Foucault (1975) has maintained, a text can be characterized by the "struggles that traverse it" (p. 135), and not by any certainty it represents or makes possible. A text becomes "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings . . . blend and clash" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). Even when held still by a frame, interpretive machinations set in motion in the frame (and which account for the frame being imposed in the first place) encourage competing interpretations among different readers and provide possibilities for varying and renewed interpretations by the same reader. The interpretation of the *Year*

2000 given here does not escape this process. Rather than achieving closure, in establishing a fixed and inviolate meaning for the *Year 2000,* this text can only expose itself to the reader's encountering mind. For this reason, it can never remain secure.

This condition should not be found threatening; it should be found exhilarating. It permits and encourages the kind of combative discourse that texts such as the *Year 2000* inevitably generate. And if texts like the *Year 2000* produce social empowerment through the encouragement of interpretive practice, then the capacity of these texts to serve as vehicles for social transformation (no matter how conceived) is assured. Through its volatility, the interpretive space it opens up and the possibilities for meaning it provides, the *Year 2000* makes impossible the imposition of social stasis it attempts to establish. No effort to force closure on a text, either from within or from without, can succeed, since it is in the relationships among the text, its intertext, and its subtext, and the interpretive moves of the reader through which these relationships are set in motion, that a text is able to reconfigure society. Foucault (1980) argues that power is "everywhere . . . it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p. 94). Because it is everywhere, because of its complex social constitution, power manifests itself through the way texts are framed and interpreted in different ways by different readers. Power resides in readers, not in texts. No text can remain safe since none can remain closed. Perhaps one should not forget that the subtitle of the *Year 2000* document is "A Framework for Learning."

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