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North American insecurities, fears and anxieties: educational implications

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Contemporary North American insecurities and fears are the focus of this article. In the first section, the inter-related concepts of insecurity, fear and vulnerability are theorised, and the argument put forward that these have come to constitute a dominant discourse in contemporary North American society. In the second section of the paper, the components of this discourse are presented by reviewing what North Americans fear, including terrorism, crime and violence, and the 'Other'. Comparisons and local manifestations of this discourse in Canada, Mexico and the US are described. The final section turns to the educational implications (effects) of this discourse as it has been taken up across the three nations. While other comparativists have focused on phenomena such as globalisation and neo-liberalism to explain contemporary education reform, the author argues that it is the discourse of fear and insecurity that now underpins educational reform.

North Americans are insecure, vulnerable and fearful people living in risky, dangerous and threatening times. We are surrounded by mass media stories about home-grown terrorist plots, global warming, rising crime rates, flu pandemics, drug wars, poverty and illegal immigrants. In many respects, it is our fears and anxieties about these threats that now drive so much public policy. With reference to the United States, Aldama (2000, 2) explains:

> Fear of non-conformity, fear of race, fear of disease, fear of touch, fear of blood, fear of non-straight sex, fear of workers, fear of women, fear of subaltern rage, fear of color, fear of desire, fear of crime, fear of 'illegals', fear of uprising. Fear is both the justification that drives the disciplinary apparatus of the nation state (police, INS, military, schools) and the intended effects on the body politic.…Fear drives the militarization of borders, anti-gay violence, abortion clinic bombers, the CIA, NSA, xenophobia, the denial of imperial guilt, enslavement, lynching, police, the Christian right, Bush's presidential campaign, [and] anti-affirmative action policies.[1]

Xenophobia and public fear about the 'Other' has marked North American societies dating back to the period of initial contact with and subsequent conquest of large proportions of First Nations peoples on the continent. The most violent forms of conquest occurred within the US and it is within that nation that we have subsequently witnessed the most extreme manifestations for control and security through policies ranging from the nineteenth century Manifest Destiny proclamation to the twenty-first century Patriot Act.

While the US stands out amongst the three North American nations in this paper's analysis of the discourse of fear and insecurity, Canada and Mexico, primarily because of their geographical proximity to this world power, have also felt sharply the effects of this discourse. Moreover, both Canada and Mexico have also, throughout their histories, experienced anxiety

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and insecurity about their larger and more powerful neighbour, due to military conflicts (e.g. the War of 1812; the US Mexico War 1846–1848); environmental threats originating in the US (e.g. acid rain); and cultural domination through the influence of the US mass media.

Contemporary North American insecurity, the focus here, is situated primarily in relation to the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) that ushered in the 'war against terror'. In this article, I begin by theorising the interrelated concepts of insecurity, fear and vulnerability, arguing that these have come to constitute a dominant discourse in contemporary North American society. In the second section of the paper, I review what North Americans fear, including terrorism, crime and violence, and the 'Other', drawing out some of the local manifestations of this discourse in Canada, Mexico and the US. In the final section, I turn attention to the educational implications of this discourse as it has been taken up across the three North American nations. While other comparativists have focused on phenomena such as globalisation and neo-liberalism to explain contemporary education reform (McGinn 1997; Jones 1998; Morrow and Torres 2003) I argue here that it is the dominant discourse of fear and insecurity that now underpins educational reform.

Insecurity, fear and vulnerability: defining the concepts

I am operating under the assumption that insecurity, fear, and vulnerability are inescapably human conditions and therefore very powerful human motivators. According to the United Nations Commission on Human Security (2003, 14), vulnerability 'exists on all levels and dimensions of society and forms an integral part of the human condition, affecting both individuals and society as a whole'. Further, Butler (2004) notes that the recognition of vulnerability as an essential characteristic of our humanity has the power to change the meaning and structure of vulnerability itself. In a sense, recognition of vulnerability is not only a condition of our humanity, but a precondition for our humanisation.

Security and control are conceptualised here as the eradication of the perception of fear, vulnerability and insecurity. In other words, to be secure lies in the assumption that one can be free from fear and insecurity. This idea, not surprisingly, has become part of militaristic solutions to secure the nation state from harm or threats. The broader term 'human security' comes out of the post-war period efforts of the international community to establish formal mechanisms to ensure global peace. In recent parlance, the term 'human security' was first used in the 1994 UN Human Development Report. The main threats to human security are said to come from unchecked population growth, disparities in economic opportunities, excessive international migration, environmental degradation, drug production and trafficking, domestic violence, national crime and international terrorism (United Nations Development Program 1994, 24–32).

These threats illustrate the complexities of human security, which other social theorists have attempted to clarify further. Bailey and Dammert (2006), for example, note that national security focuses on protecting the state or state institutions from external or internal threats; while public security, which has replaced the term 'law and order', emphasises protection of persons, property and democratic political institutions from internal and external threats or intimidation. Sources of threats to public security are mainly crime, violence, terrorism and domestic institutions characterised by incompetence, corruption and impunity. Together public and national security are now linked to the uncertainty and unpredictability of our globalised world, with the blurring of boundaries between crime and warfare, and between internal and external threats.

Furthermore, Harriss-White (2002) points to four dimensions of insecurity, namely, physical insecurity, threats to state autonomy, instability and vulnerability, which she

defines as 'a susceptibility to damage'. Vulnerability concerns not only the threats we face, but also our ability to cope with those threats (Kirby 2006). Indeed, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs defines vulnerability as a 'state of high exposure to certain risks and uncertainties, in combination with a reduced ability to protect or defend oneself against those risks and uncertainties and cope with the negative consequences' (United Nations 2003, 14). Using this definition, we can see how vulnerability is connected to risk and the ability to protect oneself against these risks. As Blaikie et al. (1994) state, risk cannot exist if there are hazards but no vulnerability.

While we may live within fearful, insecure times, it is not solely our ability to cope with threats that determine our security, but our perception about the risks we face and our related ability to cope with the consequences. For example, global epidemics may not cause an immediate reaction of fear for those populations that perceive themselves more prepared to deal with their effects. On the other hand, those who perceive themselves at risk and less prepared in the face of certain threats are likely to experience heightened levels of anxiety and fear.

In this sense, there is a certain political advantage for national governments to manage the perception and knowledge of threat. For example, the 2007 Report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made it unequivocally clear that global warming is due to human action. However, up until relatively recently, the Bush administration in the US has downplayed the full potential effects of global warming and its catastrophic consequences by questioning the science behind these facts. The management of perceptions of vulnerability such as this example suggests could possibly have the effect of a greater exposure to danger. With reference to political insecurity, Rogers questions the feasibility of attempting to keep the lid on insecurity without addressing the fundamental reasons underlying dissent, and concludes that this form of 'liddism' will actually make western societies more vulnerable (Rogers 2000 in Kirby 2006, 10).

On the other hand, national governments and the mass media, as we will see below, also have a vested interest in exaggerating certain threats to personal and national security (e.g. the threat that immigrants are taking 'our' jobs) for reasons of political control. The analytic tool of discourse, reviewed next, illustrates how these types of insecurities and fears come to be manufactured or constructed, often with little basis in 'truth'.

Discourse as an analytic tool

I argue here that particular forms of insecurity and fear are socially constructed and not necessarily representative of real threats. Statements and stories in the popular press about terrorism, rising crime rates, and immigrants who are 'cheating the system' illustrate how discourse is a concept to understand how certain ideas (which may or may not be true) come to be *thought of as true*. Discourse analysis allows us to see how a complex set of fears and anxieties have been taken up in North America and become 'truths' in the public consciousness. The relevance of discourse analysis is not in developing a case for the ontological basis of the claims of rising crime rates or the threats that terrorism poses to North Americans but in examining the productive effects of these claims in creating particular ways of thinking about society and schools.

Here I am using a Foucauldian concept of discourse to describe and understand the effects of dominant ideas and practices concerning insecurity and fear in North America. This understanding of discourse moves away from a linguistic approach that concentrates solely on language as constitutive of truth towards an analysis of the relationship between disciplinary practices (technologies) and disciplines (bodies of knowledge). This highlighting of how

knowledge of an idea is organised or systematised makes discourse an analytic tool (Foucault 1972).

Further, I am interested in the productive capacity of the discourse of insecurity. This discourse is productive in that it creates a 'regime of truth' about society, schools, curriculum and pedagogy. In this paper, I ask: What types of individuals, schools, and societies are produced through this discourse? Through this question, our attention is directed towards how bodies of knowledge produce and normalise particular ways of seeing and acting in the world. In other words, contemporary fears and anxieties about terrorism, crime and immigrants operate both to enable and constrain particular forms of educational change: because a certain way of life is feared, proponents of a particular educational discourse might operate to 'school desire' for its opposite or alternative. More than fear itself, social responses and desires may be constructed around the perception of fear and the deployment of fear as a device of control and circumscription.

Contemporary discourses of fear and anxiety when viewed as social constructs that focus on particular insecurities (crime, terrorism) and particular populations (e.g. the poor, immigrants, Muslims), allow for a critical analysis of the 'truth' claims of these insecurities. Examining what North Americans claim to fear, the topic of the next section, further allows us to understand the tenuous and manufactured nature of their fears and insecurities.

What do North Americans fear?

Terrorism

The September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks on the US Pentagon in Washington and World Trade Towers in New York City propelled terrorism to the forefront of public debate, both in North America and elsewhere. Surveys soon after the attacks showed that an overwhelming majority of Americans thought that there was a significant likelihood of further terrorist attacks on US soil (Center on Policy Attitudes 2002). Levels of fear and insecurity about terrorist threats remained high into 2002 with over 85% of Americans feeling the international terrorism was a critical threat to US vital interests. Pollsters concluded that Americans feel a greater sense of vulnerability and a greater need for alertness than they have at any time in decades (Chicago Council on Foreign Relations 2002). Fears of international terrorism have decreased since then, but remain high with almost 75% of Americans still considering terrorism a critical threat to their country (Chicago Council on Foreign Relations 2006, 16).

Polls in Mexico and Canada reveal a similar pattern. Over 80% of Mexicans viewed international terrorism and threats from chemical and biological weapons as critical threats to their country in a 2004 national poll (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económics 2004). In Canada, overall levels of insecurity about terrorism have not been as high as those found in the US and Mexico; a 2004 poll found that almost half of the Canadian population fears the country could be a terrorist target (CTV 2004). These numbers dropped slightly and then rose again in 2006 with about one in three Canadians expressing concern that Canada might be a victim of future terrorist attack (Laghi 2006). Although Canada and Mexico are not typically viewed as targets for international terrorists, their shared borders with the US increases their vulnerability to attacks directed at the US and subsequent harm to their own citizens living in the border regions.

Crime and violence

While the majority (81%) of Mexicans perceive international terrorism as a critical threat, it is drug trafficking that tops the list (89%) of critical threats to their country (Centro de

Investigación y Docencia Económics 2004). Drug trafficking is related to rates of national crime and violence, of which there are high levels of fear amongst Mexicans. The National Poll of Mexicans confirmed that the central concern of citizens is public insecurity and crime (Rodriguez et al. 2002). Seventy-five percent of Mexicans perceived that crime had increased from 2000 to 2001 and of those, 67% attributed the increase to drug trafficking and related crime. Almost half of the respondents said that living in their neighbourhood made them feel somewhat or very insecure (Moloeznik 2006).

Americans also fear crime and violence within their own country. A survey of Americans found that almost half the sample believed that crime rates had increased, even though they have been declining for almost a decade (Belden et al. 2001). Another national survey reported persistent levels of fear of crime with three in ten reporting that violence is a problem in their neighbourhoods, only one in six feel very safe in their workplaces, and just over half (52%) feeling safe when commuting to work (Bailey and Dammert 2006).

Canadians also believe that crime is increasing. A 1994 national survey found that over two-thirds believed that crime rates had increased over the previous five years. With respect to violent crime, the contrast between public perception and reality was even more striking. Despite the fact that the violent crime rate has been decreasing over the past decade, almost half the polled public thought that there had been a 'great increase' in violent crime (Roberts 2001). Overall, however, Canadians are less fearful than Americans. The International Crime Victimisation Survey, which provides historical trends with respect to levels of fear shows that levels of fear are lower in Canada than in many other western nations, including the United States and Mexico (Inter-University Consortium 2003).

Fear of the 'Other'

Popular attitudes about indigenous peoples, immigrants, refugees and those who 'look' Muslim also constitute the North American discourse of fear and insecurity. Almost one in five Canadians, as a recent poll revealed, feel uneasy in the company of a Muslim (Bethune 2006). In the US, following the 9/11 attacks, 762 'illegal' immigrants were jailed as part of the general sweep of potential suspects who *might* carry out another attack. On the basis of the idea of potential risk and their lack of legal status, authorities deported most of these individuals without charging them with any offence. America's 'Homeland Security Act' establishes demanding regulations for visitors, political refugees and immigrants to the US. Immigration policies in the US are now driven by security measures. Between 2000 and 2003, over 300,000 illegal migrants were detained or expelled by US border authorities. In 2001, the single largest category of individuals detained or expelled were those who failed to present proper documents. Mexicans, it is interesting to note, represent the largest category of those who were turned back or deported (Drache 2004).

Fearfulness of the 'Other' has been broadened to include foreign-born Canadian citizens who have even been deported to their country of birth when travelling in the US. A case in point is that of Maher Arar, Syrian born, Canadian citizen, who was arrested in New York City in 2002, deported to Syria by US authorities where he was jailed and tortured for more than a year without being formally charged. While the Canadian government has since formally apologised and financially compensated Arar for falsely accusing him of terrorist links (and then providing that information to US authorities), he still remains on the US no-fly security list.

The US media have portrayed Canada and Mexico as breeding grounds for terrorist activity because of their 'lax' refugee and immigration laws. Consequently, both Canada and Mexico have been forced to respond to the war on terror by expanding their governments'

power to deal with these *perceived* risks to national (and North American) security. For instance, the Canadian government has increased its power to detain immigrants who are considered security risks and to deport individuals whose requests for asylum have been rejected. Further, a new permanent fraud-resistant card for new immigrants and more initial screening for refugee claimants have been introduced. Similarly, after 9/11 Mexico created a new national immigration database in an attempt to track and follow specific immigrant demographics. The Mexican government detained and questioned hundreds of people of Middle-Eastern origin, restricted entry of citizens from Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries and provided US authorities with intelligence information on possible suspects in Mexico (Andreas 2003).

With respect to the US, commentators have noted that following 9/11 the distinction between citizenship and immigrant status has become more clearly delineated, creating a picture of those who do and do not deserve to be considered American (Huntington 2004). The undeserving are therefore unable to claim the benefits of the US constitution in relation to their legal and civil rights. 'Foreigners' are increasingly viewed as a threat and menace to security of the state. Mumia Abu-Jamal (2006) calls this a trend towards the 'whitening of America' and illustrates the racist nature of the discourse of fear and insecurity. The demonising of Barak Obama during the US Democratic leadership nomination campaign in 2008 through the circulation of photos of him dressed in African garb is one such example of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that in times of economic insecurity, fear of the 'Other' intensifies with attacks against those perceived to have taken 'our' jobs, and against countries where American and Canadian companies have outsourced work to cheap labourers. This is particularly relevant with the current looming economic slowdown in the US spurred by the housing crisis of early 2008, and has implications for Mexicans living and working without legal papers in the US.

Educational implications

The discourse of insecurity and fear, as the quotation at the start of this paper demonstrates, is reflected in public policy and individual behaviour. As Bourke (2005, x) writes: 'Public policy and private lives have become fear-bound; fear has become the emotion through which public life is administered'. Fear and insecurity are now the justification and rationale for the many changes that governments, organisations, and individuals have made to feel less vulnerable and secure their own safety. Specifically, we can understand the war on terror, increasing border security, anti-immigration policies, and 'get tough' anti-crime and violence policies as societal responses to the discourse of fear. Education has not been immune to these wider policy trends. Indeed, recent education reforms, as we will see next and in other articles in this special issue of *Comparative Education*, are the outcomes or effects of this broader discourse of fear and anxiety.

Safe schools policies

Newspaper headlines in the US proclaim 'The Columbine Effect' and claim that school shootings have become an epidemic. Polls consistently show that the general public in Canada and the US has become increasingly fearful about the safety of their children at school. However, there is little statistical evidence of rising rates of school violence in any of the North American nations. School violence appears to be uncommon in Mexico (Clauss-Ehlers and Lopez Levi 2002), rare in Canada and declining in the US. Each

American child has only one chance in two million of being killed on school grounds. In fact, a report from the US Department of Justice claimed that schools are one of the safest places for children to be[2] (Hancock 2001). As the prominent school violence researcher Irwin Hyman has concluded, 'As was the case twenty years ago, despite public perceptions to the contrary, the current data do not support the claim that there has been a dramatic, overall increase in school based violence in recent years' (Hyman 1998, quoted in Skiba and Peterson 1999, 373).

These fears, anxieties and insecurities, which echo the broader societal discourse of insecurity about crime and violence, have serious implications for education in North America. Despite the fact that schools are actually getting safer, the dual perception that schools are a dangerous places and that youth crime is increasing has led to the development of hardline approaches to deal with behaviour, discipline and safety problems. Increasingly, school boards across Canada and the US have adopted strict policies requiring that students be expelled or suspended for everything from carrying a gun to carrying a nail file in school. Zero tolerance policies such as these punish all offences severely, regardless of the extent of the infraction. At the heart of these policies is the notion that punishment should be rapid and inexorable; suspensions and expulsions are *mandatory* without any room for any individual (principal, teacher or student) judgement on the matter (Jull 2000).

School boards across the US have implemented zero tolerance policies in order to send a message to potential violators that misbehaviour will not be tolerated (Skiba and Peterson 1999). Canadian educational policy-makers, following US trends, have more recently adopted zero tolerance policies. In the province of Ontario, for example, school boards implemented procedures to comply with the Safe Schools Act in 2001, resulting in an increase in suspensions and expulsions since then (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2005).

In addition to these safe schools policies, other security practices have made their way into the daily routines of North American school life. In the name of school safety, lockdowns have become the new way of life at schools in many major US and Canadian cities. Full lockdowns are occasions where students are kept locked in classrooms, usually away from windows or doors and sometimes under their desks, in response to the belief that there is a danger within the school. Partial lockdowns involve locking the school doors because a violent crime has occurred nearby and the culprit has not yet been found. From 2003 to 2006, there were 25 lockdowns in Toronto (Canada) schools; and students now engage in 'lockdown drills' twice a year, leading observers to conclude that the practice has now become almost commonplace (Brown 2006).

School boards in the US (and to some degree in Canada) also have now developed terrorism drills and other crisis plans to prepare students and staff for possible terrorist attacks. Curriculum materials have been developed to teach students how to cope with natural disasters, terrorism and other forms of violence. School boards are now hiring specially trained psychologists to help students cope with the trauma of terrorism and other violent disasters. Some school districts in the United States are even going so far as to buy terrorism insurance to protect themselves against the risks of future attacks (National Institute of Mental Health 2001; Delisio 2005).

Furthermore, in the quest for security and safety, schools have also become high-tech sites, with the installation of Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) security cameras and other forms of video surveillance to monitor children of all ages at school. Students are increasingly policed outside of school as well. Illinois (USA) school board officials, for example, are now monitoring student internet use after school on popular web-sites such as www.myspace.com. Online chats and web-logs are now covered under the School Code of Conduct.

This conglomeration of safe school policies and procedures are effects of the discourse of fear and insecurity. Zero tolerance school and crime reduction policies do not only punish offenders, but they also punish dangerousness. Robinson (2001) describes this tactic within the context of crime reduction strategies that punish past crimes and the potentiality of crime in order to prevent future violations. Zero tolerance school policies similarly attempt to prevent violence by punishing students for the *potential* for violence and their display of dangerousness (Casella 2003). Castel (1991) describes the paradoxical nature of 'dangerousness', which:

> implies at once the affirmation of a quality immanent to the subject (he or she is dangerous), and a mere probability, a quantum of uncertainty, given the proof of the danger can only be provided for after the fact, should the threatened action actually occur. Strictly speaking, there can only ever be *imputations of dangerousness*, postulating the *hypothesis* of a more or less probable relationship between certain *present* symptoms and a certain act *to come*. (283)

Castel's final point is highly relevant with respect to zero tolerance policies and their relationship to risk and danger. These policies are predicated on perceptions of dangerousness that must be dealt with prior to the demonstration of real danger, violence or aggression. A question that arises is whether or not zero tolerance policies and practices including the use of CCTV cameras, lock-down drills and surveillance of student internet use actually make students feel less vulnerable or operate like 'liddism' mentioned above, and increase feelings of fear and insecurity.

Character and citizenship education

Responses to the discourse of fear can also be seen in curricular reforms such as character and citizenship education. Since 9/11, US schools have come under attack for not teaching the 'right' type of citizenship or developing the 'right' type of character in their students. Chester Finn, (former Assistant Secretary of Education under the Reagan Administration) argued that: 'American education has generally made a mess of teaching opportunity' by focusing on 'tolerance and multiculturalism, not civics and patriotism' (quoted in Kahne and Middaugh 2006, 600). Others have criticised the lack of attention paid to celebrating the achievements, successes and strengths of the nation.

These criticisms within the broader context of heightened fears about US insecurity have led policy-makers to look closely at the forms of citizenship and character education, both formal and informal, that exist within US schools. The Bush administration, for example, supported the citizenship education initiatives of the Corporation for National and Community Service and the new USA Freedom Corps; the former tied to patriotism and the latter to homeland security. Moreover, Nebraska's State Board of Education specified that their high school social studies curriculum include instruction in 'the dangers of communism and similar ideologies, the duties of citizenship, and appropriate patriotic exercises [and] exploits and deeds of American heroes, singing patriotic songs, memorizing the Star Spangled Banner …, and reverence for the flag' (Westheimer and Kahane 2004, 4).

The flag has also taken on heightened significance. Since 2001, a number of US states have passed legislation requiring that all public school and university classrooms display the US flag and a copy of the Constitution and most US states have enacted new pledge laws or amended relevant policies. Civic pride is similarly enhanced in Mexico through daily rituals such as the pledge, flag salute and standing at attention for their national anthem. Through these rituals, students learn obedience, formality and respect for tradition (Rippberger and Staudt 2003). These types of patriotic initiatives are unlikely to be widely

taken up in Canada, a nation known for its quieter form of nationalism in relation to its southern neighbour.

There are numerous other ways that students in all three countries are taught the values of good citizenship. National initiatives such as *Kids Voting* (Canada and the US) and Mexico's *La Elección es tambien Nuestros* [The Election is Ours As Well] promote voting and knowledge about elections to school-aged children. Mexico stands apart from Canada and the US in that Mexican children vote for their human rights, while children in Canada and the US vote for individual candidates. Citizenship education in the US emphasises individualism to a much greater degree compared to Mexico and Canada. Unsurprisingly this translates into lessons on the value of the free-market system, which is viewed as a core element of American nationalism (Rippberger and Staudt 2003).

The 'northern' emphasis on individualism is apparent in other aspects of citizenship and character education in the US and to some degree in Canada. Winton in this volume also notes the neoliberal emphasis on competition and preservation of the status quo evident in character education programmes in Canada and the US. Across North America, character education programmes share many common values, such as courage, responsibility, honesty, and diligence or perseverance. However, US character education programmes tend to emphasise individualism, respect and civility (e.g. Building Good Citizens for Texas); Mexican initiatives, on the other hand, focus on collective values, such as solidarity, patriotism, and responsibility (Rippberger and Staudt 2003), and Canadian character education programmes lie somewhere in between these two.

Post-9/11 educational efforts aimed at renewing and enhancing citizenship and character reflect a narrow and traditional view of the good citizen. What we are seeing in the US, and to some degree in Canada and Mexico, is the triumph of a particular form of citizenship and character education: one that emphasises loyalty, patriotism and obedience to the nation state, and (the right type of) character. The kind of citizen promoted is one who is law-obeying, hard-working, and acts responsibly within her/his own community. Critical perspectives are viewed as unpatriotic).

This traditional, safe and secure form of citizenship and character education stresses compliance and conformity amongst students with the aim to preserve the status quo (Winton in this volume). These initiatives are driven by the discourse of fear and insecurity, stemming from fears of economic insecurity and related fears of the 'Other', both within and outside of our national borders, as notions of the good citizen and good character become more exclusive and narrow.

These curricular shifts are significant in how they create a seemingly seamless discourse of 'shared' cultural memory, through appealing to an emotional form of patriotism, nationalism or collective grief (e.g. in response to 9/11 or the war in Iraq). Certain belief and value systems are legitimised while others demonised, and universal and unquestionable discourses of what is 'best' and 'good' for the individual and the nation are constructed. This practice has the effect of denying differences and silencing dissension, as well as marking those who disagree as unpatriotic, ignorant or morally bankrupt. This silencing has also occurred at the level of higher education, the topic to which I now turn.

Censorship/curtailment of academic freedom

The Anti-Terrorist legislation passed by the United States, Canada and Mexico in the wake of 9/11 has had significant implications for academic freedom. The Patriot Act (2001), for example, empowers US federal agents to obtain information about materials individuals borrow from libraries or purchase at bookstores; and allows the government to collect the

educational records of students deemed relevant for any terrorist-related investigation. Wiretapping in Canada and the US is another example of the governments' ability to access information to maintain the security of the state.

Other mechanisms have been developed to facilitate the US federal government's access to information for security purposes. The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires that high schools turn over personal information on students to military recruiters. The US military has now become a regular presence in US schools through recruitment officers and the presence of the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), a military recruiting programme to 'develop citizenship and responsibility in young people'. Schools are viewed as places where young people can be taught respect and admiration for order and discipline. Hence, following the Los Angeles 1992 riots, Colin Powell, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that the solution to the problems of city youth was the discipline and structure offered by the US military. Since then, the number of JROTC programmes has doubled in the US with over a half-million students enrolled across the country (Ayers 2006).

Legislative changes in the US also provide new mechanisms for the state to restrict the release of information, a provision that has serious implications for academic researchers. As noted above, US high schools must turn over personal information to military recruiters. The new emphasis on 'sensitive but unclassified information' is now used as a rationale for not releasing government information or the findings of government-funded academic research. In the US shortly after 9/11, federal agencies cut off public access to thousands of documents on the Internet, ordered information in government deposit libraries to be withheld or destroyed, and stopped providing materials they previously had (American Association of University Professors [hereafter AAUP] 2003).

In addition to restrictions on information, there are now new restrictions to access for students and other academics. The Student and Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS) in the US is a web-based system to track foreign students and scholars. SEVIS is intended to ensure that foreign and exchange visitors entering the US actually enrol in and attend their educational programmes. More rigorous screening of academics from countries designated 'unsafe' (e.g. Iran, Iraq) further threatens international scholarly collaboration. Moreover, SEVIS and other similar programmes also compromise the ability of applicants' ability to attend conferences in the US through restrictive visa requirements (AAUP 2003).

Heightened fears and anxieties about terrorism and crime also underpin new restrictions to research in higher education. The Patriot Act bars access to or possession of biohazards by persons deemed 'restricted'. Institutions of higher education are mandated to provide the federal government with lists of names of those who have access to 'select' biological agents or toxins, a new intrusive development in government involvement in scientific research. The new 'Interagency Panel of Advanced Science and Security' has been established to screen foreign graduate students, post-doctoral students and scientists who apply for visas to study 'sensitive' topics. Furthermore, an increasing number of academic subjects are now deemed as 'sensitive' with corresponding restrictions attached to them (AAUP 2003). More recently, the US Department of Education has adopted security clearance policies requiring educational researchers working under federal contracts to provide fingerprints and background information on such things as previous drug use (Hoff and Cavanagh 2007).

Finally, the discourse of fear and insecurity in the US has created new conditions for justifying limits to freedom of speech. College and university faculty members who have spoken out against US foreign policy, particularly after 9/11, have been reprimanded, disciplined, harassed and, in one case, threatened with dismissal from a tenured position

(Bird and Brandt 2002). Furthermore, there are numerous accounts of academics travelling to the US for research purposes, conferences and academic meetings who have been detained at the border and in some cases refused entry to the US because of undisclosed 'security issues' (Canadian Association of University Teachers 2004).

These practices have not yet found their way into Mexican and Canadian universities to the same degree, illustrating the idea that different conceptions of security create the conditions for different levels of tolerance for insecurity and risk. Of the three countries, it is the US that appears to be the most insecure and consequently most driven to 'restore' (as if there were some golden age) security and order to the nation. The irony is that the US historically and within the contemporary world has responded with the most intensity to the fears and insecurities it faces.

Conclusion

The ideas of insecurity, risk and vulnerability reflect key assumptions associated with the problems that modernity was supposed to resolve. The Enlightenment, as Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) explain, aimed to liberate men from fear and insecurity and establish their sovereignty through security. Insecurity and anxiety, and other forms of vulnerability, would be minimised as man [sic] turned to the potential of science to fix and order the uncertain world. Hence, we see the development of insurance industries during the late eighteenth century to minimise risk, first concerning seafaring and later for personal security through house insurance. However, insurance did not eliminate risk, but merely redistributed it. Indeed, insurance depended on the calculation of people's fears and anxieties about the risks they faced. As Giddens (2003, 24) argued, the idea of risk has always been involved in modernity, being 'the mobilising dynamic of a society bent on change, that wants to determine its own future rather than leaving it to religion, tradition, or the vagaries of nature'.

There is, therefore, a long history to the perpetuation of risk, fear and anxiety amongst populations. However, we appear at the start of the twenty-first century to exist within an extremely heightened state of fear, insecurity and anxiety. While this discourse of anxiety and fear may be manifest across the globe, it is within North America and particularly within the US, perhaps the most powerful country in the world today, that this discourse and its effects are most visible and salient. Constant official proclamations reinforced by the mass media ensure that the general public is continually reminded that they live in fearful times.

The analytic tool of discourse has been deployed in this paper to demonstrate that regardless of the truth basis to claims about the threats we face, there are very real effects on our daily lives. In this paper, my attention was focused on the realm of education, which has been affected by the discourse of fear and anxiety. While others have argued persuasively for understanding education reform as a response to cross-national processes such as neoliberalism, marketisation and globalisation, I have put forward the argument that the dominant discourse of fear and insecurity can best enable us to make sense of contemporary educational patterns, processes and practices.

As fear is named and 'the feared' identified, perhaps we should ask, along with what is feared and how we come to fear, what are the educational effects and implications of our fears and anxieties? The kinds of students and schools that are produced and typified through the discourse of fear are ones that are increasingly fearful and anxious about the threats they face both within the walls of their schools and the world outside. Citizenship and character education programmes at the level of compulsory schooling, and increasing

regulations on what can be studied, who can study and what one can/cannot say in the realm of higher education produces students and academics who learn to be obedient, fit in, and hesitate to question the status quo. Those who do question the new restrictions they face in their academic institutions are labelled overly critical and/or unpatriotic. We need to ask if these are the kinds of students, schools and academic institutions that reflect the values we wish to foster within our educational institutions today. Moreover, rather than letting our fears guide and shape our educational policies and practices, perhaps we need to shift from fear *of* to fear *for* (and action on behalf of) the vulnerable individuals, schools, communities, and fragile environment that surround us.

Notes

1. Some of the acronyms in this quotation may be unfamiliar to readers outside of the USA. The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) was a part of the Department of Justice and handled legal and illegal immigration and naturalisation. It ceased to exist in March 2003 and most of its functions were transferred to three new agencies within the newly-created Department of Homeland Security. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is a civilian intelligence agency and the National Security Agency (NSA), a cryptologic intelligence agency of the US government.
2. Life outside school is much more dangerous for children. An average of five US children are killed by their caregivers every day, according to the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect. Further, national education statistics show that during the 1997–98 school year 35 children were murdered in school, compared to 2752 outside the walls of the school (Hancock 2001).

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