

Higher Education and Reproduction of Dominance: The Counter-hegemonic Experiences of Israeli Students (0066)

Different structural approaches view higher educational systems such as colleges and universities as tools that reproduce culture and knowledge and by doing so conserve social structures and hierarchies. These approaches have analyzed the reproduction of domination by looking, on the one hand, at the ways that educational institutions provide differential knowledge and cultural capital to different social groups. This differentiation leads to inequalities and stratification between those different social groups (ethnic, national, gender, class) On the other hand the knowledge which is reproduced in these institutions promotes a "hidden curriculum" whereby students are socialized and behaviorally conditioned to accept hierarchical structures of power. The "authoritarian classrooms" in these institutions, where students are conditioned to become passive, conformist, and obedient members of society, legitimize social order, state ideology and power and delegitimize any intention to promote social or cultural change..

Whether in its Marxist or poststructuralist form, these reproduction approaches focus on the hegemonic system itself and the ways it works to reproduce social structures and bodies of knowledge. While doing so they fail to understand the important role of social agents in opposing, manipulating and interpreting the knowledge that is being provided to them.

This study would like to adopt the phenomenological resistance approach in order to explore the way that social agents react to knowledge provided to them. For Giroux (1983), such an approach, that takes human agency seriously, leads to possibilities of oppositional pedagogy and meaningful interventions in schools. The main question presented in this paper is what happens when the knowledge that is being reproduced and provided is critical of the social order, hegemonic ideology and inequalities in the distribution of power and other resources among social groups. How do students from different groups and minorities react to this knowledge that is being reproduced institutionally? These questions will be examined by analyzing the way that different "critical" sociological theories were accepted by students from different Israeli groups and minorities that attended sociology classes that took place in four different Israeli academic institutions.

As noted above the aim of this research was to examine how the different "critical" sociological perspectives were accepted by students from different Israeli groups and minorities. The data that was analyzed was gathered from students who participated in classes on the sociology of Israeli society that took place in four Israeli academic institutions between 2000 and 2008: Bar Ilan University, Ariel University Center of Samaria, Achva College and Dina Nursing School. The social heterogeneity of the students in these geographically scattered institutions, together with the turbulent political and social times experienced by Israeli society during the process of data collection, enabled different comparisons between the students' reactions. Although, these reactions were not analyzed statistically we believe that they shed a new light on

the role of critical thought in conflicted societies and of social agents in opposing, manipulating and interpreting the knowledge provided to them.

This research found that while some of the perspectives (Elitism, Feminism) incurred overall positive reactions from most students, other perspectives (Post Colonialism, Marxism and Pluralist Theory) provoked the students and frequently encountered antagonism. These reactions indicated that most students adopted a critical theory only when it promised to provide them with an advantage over competing groups. Accordingly, "critical" perspectives were rejected by students when they were perceived as endangering the interests and position of the groups to which they belonged. Thus, the findings of this research show that studying "critical" theories towards Israeli society does not develop universalistic points of view which perceive equality and freedom as rights to which all human beings are eligible. Critical ideas are accepted in a manner that is conditioned by the students' social background as well as by immediate sociopolitical events. The findings presented in this article suggest that even when the knowledge presented in higher education is critical to the social order it might paradoxically be interpreted, used and accepted as a mean for the reproduction of dominance.

References

Giroux, H. (1983) *Theory and Resistance in Education. A Pedagogy for the Opposition*. South Hadley: Bergin and Garvin Publishers.