

A Look over Curriculum from the Point of View of Critical Thinkers: Freire, Giroux and Apple

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Abstract

The present paper investigates the approaches of three major critical thinkers about curriculum. Henry Giroux with his theory of "Border Pedagogy" combining critical, post-modern, feminist and reconceptualist views tries to help educators and learners understand manifests of traditional borders of power, knowledge, decision-making, and sociocultural curriculums could be criticized in their pedagogies and they could even go beyond them. Then borders of existing pedagogies created by imperialism would be challenged and redefined. Freire utilizes the "Emancipatory Concept" from Habermas and Frankfurt school, uses it in the field of education and manages to provide a critical ground in educational system in which critical dialogue does not merely solve the problem but discusses new issues. Michael Apple emphasizes the role of "Hidden Curriculum" in the formation of predefined goals of imperialism and offers new solutions in this regard.

Keywords: Critical education; Freire; Giroux; Apple; Curriculum

Introduction

Critical education is a rather novel theory developed by educational thinkers like Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Michael Apple and Douglas Kellner based on the principles of critical theory (Dinarvand and Imani, 2008: 146). In critical education, schools must try to train citizens who can impose their power on their lives especially on the conditions of creation and acquisition of knowledge (FarmahiniFarahani, 2010: 129). Critical theorists could be divided into three main groups according to the origins of their thoughts. The first group including Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich emphasizes on the importance and influences of overt and open curriculum in reproduction of awareness. The second one including Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis pinpoints the importance of hidden curriculum and take the approach titled compliance or reproduction theory. The final group including Michael Apple and Henry Giroux have turned into postmodern views and an approach called Resistance theory (Share' Poor, 2004). The present paper investigates views from Freire, Giroux and Apple as three major critical thinkers on curriculum.

Paulo Freire (1921- 1997)

Paulo Freire is one of the most influential thinkers in the field of politics. He was born in Brazil and was an educator of adult classes for most of his career trying to help oppressed and deprived people in urban and rural regions of his country (Fathi and EjarGah, 2007: 52). He believes emancipatory education to be liberatory, conscientization and humanization and considers it possible only if all people participate. he discovered a novel phenomenon using his views from antecedents in Frankfurt school and his own experiences and named it the "Culture of Silence". The nature of human for Freire is in the world and with the world. The essential role of human for Freire is an individual being able to influence the world around him and change it so that a better world could be created for life whether individually or collectively (Freire, 1977: 23).

Freire's educational model has three stages:

- A. **Dialogue:** the process of group discussions enabling learners acquire collective knowledge through which the society could be changed.
- B. **Posed-problem:** teacher is a cultural worker helping learners recognize issues of the society and assist them to solve those problems.
- C. **Representation:** learners begin facing and challenging issues through discovering ideas or creating signs hidden in their life experiences.
- D. **Confidification:** they utilize their past and present experiences to understand social issues and use them as a guide for social act.
- E. **Conscientization:** the learner at this stage goes through magical and simple awareness and reaches critical awareness.

Freire's educational model, therefore, includes dialogue, posing problem, representation, confidification and conscientization (Shor, 1987).

Freire rejects traditional education and names it banking education. He offers liberatory education with its principles and purposes among his works. Educators in critical theory guide the learners through radical practices into revising social relations, power, classes and motives. Critical theory encourages learners to

develop their knowledge of their social roles and desires (Betty et.al. 2009: 110). For him, teachers are cultural workers for education is formed inside culture and tradition existing in a society. A colonized system tries to employ education as a coordinator of thoughts; thus, some people try to suggest the masses they are unable to make decisions and participate in education and an elite group must be in control of the affairs. Nevertheless, Freire believes that this group of elites defends a specific sort of democracy in which people are ill and need treatment. Yet, their only illness is their desire for freedom of speech and participation in the society (Freire, 1989: 39- 40). According to Freire, education is not evaluated by the ability to read and write. He believed that when reading and writing is directed to change, true education occurs. Then, thought and practice are combined and advancement emerges. Therefore, true education for Freire is a combination of practice and thought (Roberts, 2000: 16). He believed in the principle that a word is the outcome of practice and thought and lack of either one will damage the other one (Freire, 1979: 83). Therefore, literacy is the ability to enter activities in which literacy will end in efficient work. Literacy, in fact, is a tool for a better world and more advancement. This definition by Freire will influence curriculum greatly. On the other hand, Freire believes education to be a political affair for it cannot be unbiased in social issues. Thus, he focuses on global development along with current domestic needs in compiling curriculum for a country. This compilation must involve all those who have the ability to participate in it. An elite group selected by the government does not conduct curriculum designing anymore. All groups participate in curriculum design and propose their views in order to improve the curriculum. Furthermore, curriculum must come with economic activities. Modern education does not separate schools and universities from factories or farms. It does not stand against them as well. In other words, new men or women are not created only because society needs them unless they work in a production line for public interest. Freire's thoughts had great impacts on Giroux's approaches.

Henry Giroux

Giroux is one of the eminent thinkers in the field of political curriculum whose focus was the conflicts of politics, culture and education (FathiVajargah, 2007: 71). Giroux is a postmodern theorist of education. In 1970, he utilized the "reproduction theory" and claimed that school and classroom correspond with class structure of the society and this correspondence reveals that schools constantly reproduce class structure in the society. He soon began criticizing this theory and supported a novel theory named "resistance theory". In this regard, schools do not necessarily follow social structure reproducing dominant cultural model. Students are not mere followers of the teacher as well. However, resistance was soon proved to be helping the dominant class and stabilizes social classes in the society. In the 1990s, Giroux developed a new theory called "border education". Border education believes that teachers live inside social, political and cultural borders which are multiple and plural. Therefore, curriculum must reflect this multitude and plurality (FarmahiniFarahani, 2010: 129). Accordingly, Giroux uses Freire's ideas to analyze American educational system and proposes critical education aiming to reach a literacy that can identify issues and analyze them (Kardan, 2008: 272). He believed that education is an inherently political process and schools must be seen as public domains of democracy. In these domains, critical education trains critical citizens. Giroux emphasizes the differences and focuses on education of minority groups like women and other racial subgroups. For him, teachers are development-inducing intellectuals who train wise and knowledgeable students away from the dominant totalitarianism. According to Giroux, scripts are not a sacred material and schools ought to discover a new language for novel forms of science. Giroux also believed in multiple voices in classroom, domination of the script and radical democracy and the hidden curriculum. Following Michel Foucault, Giroux uses cultural studies as an interdisciplinary field to enrich critical education and redefine knowledge-power pair. His works emphasize various key concepts. These concepts vary from equality, democracy, cultural policies, and critical education to the teacher as a development-inducing intellectual and elevating human dignity through eliminating oppression and its various forms. It is worth mentioning that not only does he refer to these concepts several times, but also expands their area and tries to redefine the connection between education and numerous cultural production and battles. His main concern in critical education is that dialogue is a method through which students in a classroom connect symbols and pictures using verbal and nonverbal languages and interact with each other.

In his book "Postmodern Education: Politics, Culture and Social Criticism" coauthored with Arnowitz he mentions students' need for understanding strengths of different cultural traditions and multiple voices and believes that student must learn to act and actively participate in political, critical and ethical discussions. Later on, he demonstrates an expanded discussion between conservatives, liberals and radical on education. He speaks of an aggressive conservatism in the 1980s that controlled education and redefined curriculum in order to eliminate liberal and left thoughts at schools. Conservatives took schools as a base for expanding their domination over culture and expressing their views. In this book, he divides educators into two groups: 1- seeking changes and critical, 2- seeking conformism. The first group tolerates great pressures but the second group acquires rewards and promotions. For Giroux, educators are change-inducing intellectuals with an indispensable social and political role. Their role is not sticking to abstract goals evading them from daily life.

They are cultural agents taking social roles. Another important book of Giroux "Teachers as Intellectuals", gives the title change-inducing intellectuals to teachers. For him, teachers' role is not to utilize science to integrate and create objectivity. Teachers ought to know how to use it to liberate learners. He believed that learners must become beneficial citizens for a democracy-based society. He tries to give more freedom to teachers and considers this freedom of vital value for the educational system. He says "it is important to emphasize that if teachers are not given the freedom and power to systematize and formulate their condition in relation to public education, produce continuous curriculums and liberating policies, it is nonsense to talk about avant-garde educational changes" (Giroux 1997: 107). Like Brenstein, Giroux considers education to be part of knowledge production and identity formation and formulate relationships. For instance, never does he offer a broad understanding of education as a tool for communicating knowledge and social relations but clarifies its general level and creates different types of identity and knowledge using various forms of education.

Michael Apple

Michael Apple is the professor of Curriculum and Instruction in the University of Wisconsin in the United States. From his point of view, the American society is formed of individuals from various racial, economical backgrounds and this makes it difficult to reach an agreement on what should be taught and the teaching methods at school. For him, the question of what should be taught to students is a problem deeply connected with values, preferences, equality, happiness and choice (FathiVajarGah, 2008: 60). He believes that we are going through an extremely difficult period and we need a critical theory of some kind. We are experiencing emotional, cognitive and political inequalities. Power and strength have created a social ground on which several important affairs look upside down. Oppressor has turned into the oppressed. Privacy has changed into publicity and looking for democracy has become a destructive factor for dominant groups (ibid). In his book titled "Ideology and Curriculum", he defines reproduction via following components:

1. Education justifies and reproduces inequality in capitalist societies. The important factors for this reproduction include: racism-oriented behavior, elites, executors of educational regulations and lack of relationship between curriculum and real life.
2. Education represents power, racism, unequal and unjust relations and gap between classes in a capitalist society. This in combination with totalitarianism of executors and managers of schools and domination of rulers and politicians will create a system in which production, distribution, exchange and using knowledge will be official and anything else will be rejected as illegitimate.
3. Education in its current form cannot neutralize reproduced social relations and requires a critical understanding of the performance of schools.
4. The main task schools should pursue is to keep students. Schools in fact are places that help parents not worry about their kids' retention.

Apple believes that in spite of the existing resistance, domination lingers and this will continue until laborers and working class are awakened. He believes hegemony and the role of education at this time focuses on its creation and strengthening it and analyzes its various forms (Apple, 1979: 1). For Apple, education is a political affair. Education plays great roles in social reproduction of knowledge and power and creates domination. The process through which a specific class or group imposes its desires and interests on people from other groups and classes.

He considers education beyond official institutions like schools and believes that it covers a wide range of families, organizations etc. These institutions must actively and continuously change and reproduce the dominant effective culture. Then, education is combined with ideology and the dominant class and tries to liberate itself (Apple, 1979: 5). Apple was among the pioneer thinkers who spoke of curriculum as a political script in the 1970s. He defines hidden curriculum as dependent on the concept of domination. Curriculum for Apple includes subjects and regulations that strengthens the power transferring legitimacy to students and institutionalizes it. Hidden curriculum emphasizes on norms and values of the dominant class so efficiently that any challenge to it will be considered illegitimate. Apple in his book "Educating the Right Way" discusses various issues all of which are somehow related to curriculum. Issues like the relationship between church and the government, economy and religion, managerialism, neoliberalism, neoconservatism and authoritarian populism are among them. For instance, neoliberals look for educational policies to go around economy and they lead this coalition. These people see a strong connection between school and business and especially world capitalmarket and view humans as materialists. Neoconservatives on the other hand think their culture will be eliminated if they cannot gain control over schools. They do not trust local managers and educators and try to find mechanisms by which they could control culture of values and behaviors through national or provincial curriculums and national examinations. Apple rejects all these views supporting democratic education. In this regard, the educator pays more attention to daily life at school and its details helping schools establish real cooperation with local communities. He also rejects the supermarket type view toward education (like banking education for Freire) and believes that education is not merchandise or an economic stuff. Students are not

recognized by what they buy as well. Students for him are recognized by what they do. Education is a political concept and students should take their roles in building and reconstructing educational system (Apple, 2006: 215). In another book of his titled "Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age" refers to social movements and their roles in making fundamental changes in a society and training member of the society accordingly and believes that the indecent condition education has these days could not be overcome unless all groups participate actively and use democracy (Apple, 2002: 39).

Conclusion

From the point of view of Freire, critical education is related to the creation of critical conscience in humans. The task critical education pursues is to give critical awareness to those oppressed and this could be the beginning of their liberating movement. Official education for Freire is another way through which the dominant maintain inequalities in a society. Yet, education has the potential to improve critical intelligence and induce social changes. He believes there is nothing as neutral education. Therefore, curriculums must pay attention to culture, knowledge and science just like their political education so that the society will have participating citizens in the future and could make proper choices and vital decisions. Without a political view, education could not provide the grounds for the establishment of a dialogue-based system based on democratic principles. Henry Giroux is another prominent figure in the field of critical education. In response to this problem, he says what sort of ideological and institutional conditions should be provided in order to strengthen the learners for solving their own and their society's problems. For Giroux, literate members of the society could receive messages from the media or the dominant culture without a critical thought and as a result help their colonizers exploit them better. Finally, Apple thinks education must get involved with sociopolitical challenges and believes that education could not be neutral neither ethically nor logically. Moreover, curriculums must be taken more seriously for schools use hidden curriculums to turn students into obedient individuals and prepare them implicitly for the predetermined position they will have in the society.

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