Research of Human Resistance in Schools

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School classrooms involve complex human and environmental interactions. The classroom-based cultural landscapes hold unique teacher-student and student-student interrelationships that can mirror socioeconomic experiences of the larger community. In all these relationships, human agency permeates teachers' and students' interactions. Students' interpretation of and their responses to classroom culture can have profound effects on their achievement. Belonging, cultural relatedness, and autonomy are some of many issues that play key roles in determining students' motivation to approach or resist participation in learning activities. Resistance theories, in particular, provide a unique description of the classroom culture by examining how students or teachers perceive and respond to cultural dominance. Generally, resistance involves actions that passively or actively oppose the dominant culture. These actions serve to preserve students' or teachers' (as the case may be) sense of autonomy and identity.

CULTURAL OPPOSITIONAL THEORY

John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham (Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu, 2003) propose a resistance theory that explores minority students' reactions to cultural dominance. Originating with John Ogbu, this theory explores how different ethnic groups respond to different cultural landscapes. Ogbu suggests that ethnic-minority groups in the United States fall into one of two categories: voluntary minorities or involuntary minorities. These categories matter in the interpretation of mainstream cultures. Voluntary minorities are those who came or whose ancestors came to the United States out of their own free will (e.g., Vietnamese, Irish). Involuntary minorities are those whose ancestors were brought to the United States by force (e.g., African Americans) or whose ancestors were forced into ethnic minority status by military force (e.g., Native Americans).

Ogbu posits that voluntary minorities hold positive beliefs about the dominant society and, as a result, are more likely to adopt the attitudes and practices of the dominant group. In contrast, involuntary minorities hold less positive beliefs about the dominant society. These groups, such as the African Americans and Native Americans, see the United States as taking away or compromising their civil liberties. Ogbu suggests that, for many involuntary minorities, adopting dominant attitudes or behaviors is perceived as supporting their oppression. These beliefs for involuntary minorities have been substantially investigated by Ogbu and Fordham (Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu, 2003). In school context, Ogbu's 1991 findings suggest that voluntary minorities have more positive attitudes toward schooling, teachers, and the curriculum. Whereas Southeast Asian and Chinese students accepted greater responsibility for academic underachievement, involuntary minorities avoided responsibility and asserted blame on teachers and school administrators.

In addition to attitudes, Ogbu and Fordham argue that perspectives of involuntary minorities manifest themselves in "oppositional behavior." That is, involuntary minorities react according to their beliefs about the dominant culture by engaging in behaviors that is in opposition to it. To support this notion, Ogbu (2003) reports that, in school contexts, involuntary minorities are more likely to disengage in academic activities than voluntary minorities. Ogbu called such behavior the "norm of minimal effort." Ogbu also found that these behavioral norms to disengage from academic activities were reinforced by African Americans who label other African American students who

pursue academic achievement as "acting white." Such labels reinforce the notion that participating in dominant institutions by involuntary minorities contributes to the power of the dominant culture. In other words, if one succumbs to participating in the institutions of the dominant culture, then one becomes a member of that culture.

Furthermore, it is common to hear the expression, "talking white," a similar label to "acting white," applied to African Americans who use standard English. Limiting standard English in school is an important oppositional behavior that resists the dominant school culture. Similarly, a study by Bryan Brown (2003) explored how minority students in a science class avoided using scientific terms during classroom discourse, thus continuing to oppose the standard curriculum and pedagogy. These oppositional behaviors can have significant negative results on students' achievement. Ogbu (2003) observed an interesting phenomenon among students who resisted succumbing to the dominant academic culture: These students, while believing that education can lead them to economic stability, also held beliefs that athletics and entertainment could also serve as pathways to similar, if not better economic outcome.

Finn (1999), while using Ogbu's notions to describe reasons for students' resistance, brings together research of other scholars to expand sociological reasons for students' resistance beyond resistance of involuntary minority communities. Finn synthesizes a body of research on resistance of students from working-class families (Anyon, 1981; Weis, 1990; Willis, 1977) to suggest that the mismatch between working-class students' goals and their teachers' goals creates a social environment that is reminiscent of the relationship between management and workers within a factory. Within such a relationship, the management's goals have to do with meeting production quotas whereas the workers' goals have to do with managing and lowering the amount of work that is required while maintaining salaries that can support their families. Finn reports that in such work environments, workers often develop systems that slow down the productivity. Likewise, Finn makes the connection to working-class students who challenge their teachers, sometimes subversively, by developing mechanisms to lower the amount of required work. An example of such a mechanism is students' asking a series of relevant and irrelevant questions to waste class time.

Finn, then, makes an explicit connection between Ogbu's work on resistance of involuntary minorities and that of scholars who describe resistance of working-class students by describing the relationship between unions and management. Union members who are seen as not cooperating with the union and collaborating with management are often harassed by other union members. For example, workers who beat their quota are often called derogatory names, reminiscent of the "acting white" term that is described by Ogbu. Likewise, working-class students who are seen to increase the amount of work in the classroom are also alienated by their classmates. Such oppositional social structures are natural spawning grounds for oppositional identities that enable resistance to school work.

CRITIQUE OF OPPOSITIONAL THEORY

While Ogbu's notions are well known in the education research community, his ideas are not without critics. The first set of criticism comes from Solorzano and Dolores Delgado-Bernal (2001), who challenge Ogbu's theory by suggesting that Ogbu focuses on "self-defeating" resistance. They, instead, posit that resistance can also have transformative effects. In their reconceptualization of Ogbu's work, they argue that there are four main types of students' resistance. The first type of resistance focuses on opposition with no orientation or awareness of social justice or the dominant culture. During such resistance, students exhibit poor classroom behavior for the sake of disrupting classroom instructional activities. Another type of resistance is self-defeating resistance. As a part of this type of resistance, students engage in oppositional behaviors with no real goal for bringing about

social justice, although they may have some notion about societal inequities. This is most similar to Ogbu's notions of oppositional behavior. The third type of resistance is labeled as the conformist resistance. These students are very much aware of social injustice but do not respond to these beliefs by their actions. These students adopt dominant behaviors, in spite of their knowledge about society and school contexts. Finally, Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal describe the final type of resistance, transformative resistance. These students see the world as unjust and engage in oppositional behavior to bring out social justice. These behaviors may include students' working harder to disprove negative expectations about their academic abilities or to challenge poor and racist classroom curricula or pedagogy.

Interestingly, in addition to describing development of oppositional identities of working-class students, Finn (1999) also identifies transformative people who have the power to create educational environments. While he describes resistance from the perspective of differentiated goals for education between students and teachers, he also describes societal leaders as having the option to be transformative. Finn does not believe that education in which students unconditionally do the work that teachers assign is "powerful." He believes that students must participate in their own education and that educators should establish educational environments in which students have access to empower themselves. To this end, Finn draws on the work of Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) to describe three types of educators: hegemonic, critical, and transformative. Hegemonic educators work to maintain the status quo by recreating an educational environment that, in its own right, recreates the social classes of students. In such classrooms, working-class students attempt to lower their workload while middle-class students do all their assigned work and learn how to glean information from textbooks. Critical educators believe themselves to be free of bias and think that they provide the same education to all students, regardless of students' backgrounds, including ethnicity and socio-economic class. Nonetheless, critical educators maintain the status quo by not actively challenging it by empowering students to take control of their education. Transformative educators help their students actively resist societal hegemony and take the power of education into their control. This, of course, fits directly into Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal's 2001 notion of transformative resistance.

Research on resilience highlights this notion of transformative resistance. Researchers such as Hassinger and Plourde (2005) suggest that students adopt adaptive behaviors to disprove prevailing expectations or stereotypes. Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) describe how students engaged in resistance behavior in order to announce their opposition to California state policy limiting bilingual education. Their resistance was aimed at promoting, in their mind, social justice.

The work of Horvat and Lewis (2003) counters Ogbu's notions about the significance of the "acting white" label by suggesting two counter examples. First, they review literature that suggests that the behaviors associated with negatively labeling students who participate in academic pursuits reflect students' in-group/outgroup school hierarchies that are typical of teen-agers, regardless of ethnicity, similar to the description above of working-class students resisting schoolwork. Second, Horvat and Lewis describe their own research in which they found that "acting white" was not a dominant force in African American female students' academic decisions. They report that African American females who participated in their research navigated among diverse set of African American peers from various socioeconomic strata of society. This challenge to Fordham and Ogbu's notions does not negate the phenomena of resistance, but it certainly complicates the occurrence of resistance among involuntary minorities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOMS AND TEACHERS

Research on resistance theory highlights the need for some students to actively engage in oppositional behaviors. This is a choice that they make and this choice may be based on awareness of the dominant culture and social injustice. The reasons for students' resistance may be difficult for teachers to assess. Oppositional behaviors may be the result of peer cultural norms (Horvat & Lewis, 2003), disparate goals of students and teachers (Finn, 1999), or awareness of social injustice (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). In light of the latter two reasons, the teacher needs to facilitate students' autonomy by allowing students to critique the curriculum and classroom pedagogy. Some researchers suggest that autonomy-supportive behaviors, such as permitting students' opportunities to voice opinions and oppositions to classroom activities, promote engagement in and positive attitudes about the classroom (Assor et al., 2002).

Students who engage in oppositional behavior as a result of cultural norms, however, require a different set of responses from teachers. One solution comes from Freire's 1993 notions regarding the pedagogy of the oppressed. While some students may resist standard curriculum as a tool designed to oppress them, teachers can use strategies that raise students' awareness about societal inequities and provide tools by which students may combat social injustice.

Another task for teachers is to carefully examine what activities, behaviors, and artifacts are valued by the class culture and school administration. Oakes and Lip-ton (2003) suggests that some schools and teachers show what is important in schools by way of rewarding key behaviors or attitudes. For example, schools show that they value high grades by posting names of students with excellent academic achievement. For many schools, these students may be racially identifiable. Other talents or abilities that reflect more student diversity may not be highly valued by a school. Teachers and school communities should take a critical examination of what gets praised and rewarded, determine whether these values favor one ethnicity over another, and search for activities that value and convey social justice.

Finally, Gloria Ladson Billings (1997; 1998; 2000) and Geneava Gay (2002; 2004; 2005) write extensively about teachers' making their curriculum culturally relevant. They suggest that classrooms should be spaces in which students find a sense of belonging, in which students believe that their teachers understand them, and in which instructional activities reflect students' experiences by building on their prior knowledge. In these classrooms, students should work with and not in opposition to the teachers because their experiences are a part of the classroom culture; there is a symbiotic relationship that supports and promotes positive learning experiences for students as well as teachers.

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