Social Class and School Knowledge

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**Author**  Jean Anyon

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Notes:
1a) "...[I]t seems that what constitutes school knowledge here is (1) fragmented facts, isolated from context and connection to each other or to wider bodies of meaning, or to activity or biography of the students; and (2) knowledge of 'practical' rule-governed behaviors--procedures by which the students carry out tasks that are largely mechanical. Sustained conceptual or 'academic' knowledge has only occasional, symbolic presence here" (p. 12).

- Students in working-class school settings are expected to learn facts, not necessarily to think about those facts or to understand wider meaning.
- 'Academic' knowledge might not be necessary for them to learn, if the system is setting them up to acquire jobs that do not necessarily require academic knowledge, but instead systematic knowledge and facts derived through rote memorization.

**Tags:** academic knowledge, cognition, facts, rote, system, thinking, working class

1b) "A second-grade teacher stated to me that she did not mind teaching in this school because it was 'easy,' compared to many other schools. She said that she would want to teach in the district's school for the 'gifted and talented.' 'You have to work too hard. I have a friend who teaches there and she goes in early every day. She's always doing something special.' Another second-grade teacher said that the children in her school were getting 'dumber' as the years went by. She also said, "I would never teach in the suburbs. There parents there think their kids are God's gift. Although, some parents here are beginning to think they have rights, too"" (p. 7).

- The teachers display a deficiency mindset, just as the students seem to. Oddly enough these seem similar; the teachers do not seem to want to work hard, and may even feel themselves incapable of working at an affluent school. Likewise, the students might not feel they're smart enough to move up.
- One teacher indicates that the parents are starting to believe "they have rights." Would she try to put the parent down? Is this a perpetuation of class reproduction?

**Tags:** class, deficiency mindset, perpetuation, reproduction, social, working class

1c) "I asked another child if knowledge comes from inside or outside, and he said, 'If you're smart, it comes from inside, but if you're not and you're not organized, the teacher tells you what to do'" (p. 21).

- Students at the affluent professional school retain elements of both the middle-class and elite professional school; they believe that knowledge can be created, but they also believe that it can come from an authority like the teacher.
- Organization and intelligence are held in high regard, but there is also the knowledge that someone from above has the power to tell an individual what to do.

**Tags:** affluent, affluent professional, authority, intelligence, knowledge, school

1d) "It should be noted that during discussions of school knowledge not a single child in either working-class school used words such as 'think,' or 'thinking'...They, more than the children in any other school, seemed to be trying to guess what it was I wanted them to say rather than to reflect on their own
Students are not necessarily taught to think for themselves; this could be setting them up for jobs in menial labor where not much thinking, creativity, or metacognition takes place. This could be the system's way of "keeping them down," if they are taught to conform to the system and there are repercussions if they don't.

Tags: education, meritocracy, metacognition, system, thinking

1e) "Those who would struggle against ideological hegemony must not confuse working-class powerlessness with apathy, middle-class ideology with its inevitability, or ruling-class power and cultural capital with superior strength or intelligence. Just as blacks were not the happy-go-lucky fellows of former stereotypes, so the working class is not dull or acquiescent, and the rich are not complacent or secure. Indeed, perhaps the most important implication of the present study is that for those of us who are working to transform society, there is much to do, at all levels, in education" (p 39).

- Stereotypes do not always accurately reflect the ideologies and mentalities of a particular class; what appears on the surface does not always coincide with what lurks beneath the surface.
- It may be desirable to transform the working class, but there should also be a desire to transform the upper classes as well; there is much for both classes, and the others in between, to learn.

Tags: education, power, social class, society, stereotypes

2) Refer to the tags after each section.

Tags: key concepts

3) The author's main argument is that social reproduction reflects itself in the school system. Even in a standardized curriculum where the students are exposed to more or less the same topics of study, different texts, different teachers, different social classes, and different environments all play a role in the education of youth.

Tags: education, main argument, pedagogy, school system, social reproduction

4a) Anyon (1981) would possibly state that the role of a teacher is to acknowledge the differences in teaching when it comes to different social classes. Even with a standardized curriculum, not all students will be necessarily learning the same things, nor will they necessarily be learning how to think. It may be difficult to transcend in one's teaching from the onset--especially when many teachers at a particular school have a deficiency mindset--but the first step towards social change is the acknowledgement that such inequalities exist. As Anyon states, "Ideological hegemony is, rather, extremely tenuous, and the working class may be less ideologically secured than some other social groups. What is important is to make
available to working-class students the cultural and ideological tools to begin to transform perspicacity into power" (p. 33). In other words, teachers should learn to empower the working classes. At the same time, teachers have the responsibility to make available many educational opportunities to those in higher classes, as much more can be learned about social structure and what one can do to improve the state of societal systems.

Tags: responsibilities, roles, teacher, teaching

4b) Anyon (1981) may agree with Jay MacLeod's (1987) theory that the working class engages in a type of resistance. She notes examples of students misbehaving in order to get the teacher angry. She then notes that students struggle not to smile or laugh when they see the teacher upset. These students demonstrate their own forms of resistance against the teacher in their own ways. MacLeod, by contrast, notes that the high school students, particularly the Hallway Hangers, engage in their own forms of resistance by resisting the social system itself. They adopt their own meanings of what is right, they adopt their own ideologies of what the "ideal human" is, and they perpetuate their own rituals that seem to coincide with machismo and their retention of power through sexuality. Unlike Anyon, who writes that the students would stop their bad behavior if the teacher would only teach better or care more about them, MacLeod does not necessarily mention what would stop the Hangers from engaging in their own behaviors. He does not even indicate that the Hangers might stop their behavior if their teachers cared more about them; indeed, the Hangers distance themselves significantly from their school education.

Anyon, like MacLeod, also mentions social reproduction, which she defines as "aspects of school knowledge that contribute directly to the legitimation and perpetuation of ideologies, practices, and privileges constitutive of present economic and political structures" (1981, p. 31). She acknowledges that schools actively reinforce class and social structures by perpetuating ideologies. This is demonstrated through working class schools teaching skill sets and rote memorization instead of in-depth cognition, versus elite professional schools placing great emphasis on thinking and creativity. MacLeod may agree with this view--especially because the Hangers seem to aspire mainly to menial, working class jobs that do not necessarily require creativity or in-depth thinking. However, the Brothers do not necessarily fall neatly into this category because their aspirations transcend their current social systems; they aspire to make it in a higher class through hard work, yet they fail to acknowledge the role that social reproduction plays in their own education.

Tags: knowledge, MacLeod, political structure, resistance, social class, social reproduction

5) Anyon's (1981) article has enabled me greatly to learn the roles that social structures play in the school system. More than anything, she has enabled me to reflect on my own schooling. When I was in elementary school, I went to a school that predominantly had working-class students mixed with a few middle-class students. I clearly remember rote memorization practices, as well as instruction that focused heavily on the book. There was also a heavy amount of patriotism apparent in our schooling and in our practices; the school had to sing a patriotic song after the Pledge of Allegiance, and great emphasis was placed on Presidents' holidays.

When I went to middle and high school, I was surrounded by slightly more affluent students, almost all of them middle- or middle-upper-class. Going to a private school exposed me to different mentalities, and I was asked to think more in-depth and to be more creative. Additionally, the teachers had high aspirations
for the students; we were all expected to go to a college of some sort after high school, and the majority went to the local community college while many more went to four-year universities. By the time I reached college, I was surrounded by predominantly upper-class and middle-class students. There was a greater emphasis placed on classics, more attention paid to politics, more emphasis placed on thinking and cognitive reasoning. Special treatment was also given to students at my university with the assumption that everyone had money, especially since the university had the second-highest tuition rate in the country. They upheld the ideal that we would get a job no matter what, because the alumni network was so strong and filled with affluent people, and by name alone the school's reputation would secure a decent, well-paying job. The same mentality held true when I completed my first graduate degree. It was a very different mentality compared to that of my elementary school.

Anyon's text coincides heavily with MacLeod's, as stated in point 4b. I was able to synthesize various aspects of pedagogy and learning theories, and through the vivid illustrations in Anyon's text was able to see how those ideas played out, and how they differed between social classes. Anyon is calling for readers to examine these differences and to be aware of them. I definitely will want to make myself aware of these differences if I am to be an effective educator, so that regardless of whether I am placed at a working-class, middle-class, or upper-class school, I will be able to teach effectively and to transcend across the boundaries of class, so as to work against perpetuating deficiency mindsets and the defective status quo.

**Tags:** class mobility, deficiency mindset, education, educational background, learning, own opinion, responsibilities, roles, self-knowledge, social class, status quo

**Attachments**

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