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Source: *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 38 (2009), pp. 33-48

Published by: Annual Reviews

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20622639>

Accessed: 10-01-2019 19:31 UTC

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Social Reproduction in Classrooms and Schools

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Annu. Rev. Anthropol. 2009. 38:33–48

First published online as a Review in Advance on June 12, 2009

The *Annual Review of Anthropology* is online at anthro.annualreviews.org

This article's doi:
10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085242

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0084-6570/09/1021-0033\$20.00

Key Words

language, social class, social inequality, education, ethnographies, multilevel analysis

Abstract

Social reproduction theory argues that schools are not institutions of equal opportunity but mechanisms for perpetuating social inequalities. This review discusses the emergence and development of social reproduction analyses of education and examines three main perspectives on reproduction: economic, cultural, and linguistic. Reproduction analyses emerged in the 1960s and were largely abandoned by the 1990s; some of the conceptual and political reasons for this turning away are addressed. New approaches stress concepts such as agency, identity, person, and voice over the structural constraints of political economy or code, but results have been mixed. Despite theoretical and methodological advances—including new approaches to multilevel analysis and alertness to temporal processes—the difficult problem remains to understand how social inequality results from the interplay of classrooms, schools, and the wider society.

INTRODUCTION

Concern with the processes whereby societies and cultures perpetuate themselves has an ancient pedigree, traceable back to Aristotle's (1959) analysis of the domestic economy in political orders. Researchers have suggested that scholastic institutions were important sites of cultural reproduction in classical Greece (Lloyd 1990), imperial Rome (Guillory 1993), medieval Europe (Bloch 1961), and modern France (Durkheim 1977). Overt concern with social reproduction is, however, a product of post-World War II social dynamics, especially the political and intellectual ferment of the 1960s. It is a product of concern with inequality. As a framework of inquiry, it draws from diverse disciplines but is typically rooted in dialogue with Marxist traditions of social analysis.

Early studies of social reproduction in education emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, Britain, and France. Foundational works include Bowles & Gintis's (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America* (United States), Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labor* (Britain), and Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society* (France). Although these works differed in regard to theorization, scope of analysis, and methodology, each attempted to trace links between economic structures, schooling experience, and modes of consciousness and cultural activity. Their analyses responded to debates concerning central contradictions of these postwar societies. In each country, public education was officially understood and presented as a meritocratic institution in which talent and effort alone predicted outcomes, but by the post-World War II period considerable evidence indicated otherwise (e.g., Coleman 1966, Jencks 1972).

The basic reproductionist argument was that schools were not exceptional institutions promoting equality of opportunity; instead they reinforced the inequalities of social structure and cultural order found in a given country. How they were understood to do so depended on the theoretical perspective of analysts, the sites they prioritized for study, and a varying

emphasis on top-down structural determination versus bottom-up agency by individuals or small groups. Early research on educational reproduction provided structuralist accounts, identifying systematic features of language, culture, and political economy, which were reflected in the conduct and organization of classrooms and curricula and assigned a causal role in perpetuating linguistic, cultural, and economic inequalities (Bernstein 1975, Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, Bowles & Gintis 1976). The economic perspective on reproduction (Bowles & Gintis 1976) attracted criticism for its treatment of culture as secondary to economics and politics. "Cultural reproduction" analyses, when they emerged, often attempted to integrate class analyses with analysis of race or gender formation and to investigate the social practices of small groups. An early, influential and highly controversial argument about class and education focused on the role of language (Bernstein 1960, 1964). It was quickly taken up for criticism and exploration by sociolinguistic and anthropological researchers in the United States but with an emphasis on ethnicity and culture and a focus on situated communication, especially in classrooms (Cazden et al. 1972).

Although the reproductive thesis is simple to state in academic terms, it has been and continues to be quite unpalatable to many of those who work in schools or educational systems more generally (Rothstein 2004). This is probably because it presents a direct challenge to meritocratic assumptions and seems to dash egalitarian aspirations. Early arguments and analyses of reproduction were also of their era, the 1960s and early 1970s, when economic and social stability seemed more secure than it has in recent decades. They were also formulated with a structuralist intellectual confidence that has not survived the intervening decades of reflexive, postmodern uncertainty (Bauman 1997). By the early 1990s, there was a turning away from arguments about social reproduction and education, whether focused on economic, cultural, or linguistic dimensions. This is puzzling in some respects because the problem of

inequality remains a central feature of the contemporary world, within nations and on a global scale (Henwood 2003; Stiglitz 2002), and the centrality of straightforward economic factors in school performance appears little changed over more than 40 years (Coleman 1966, U.S. Dep. Educ. 2001).

This review surveys studies developing economic, cultural, and linguistic perspectives on social reproduction in classrooms and schools. After examining work using each lens, it then discusses why the reproduction framework was largely abandoned, exploring the conceptual and political dilemmas that seem to have motivated the turn to new approaches and assessing the achievements and limitations of subsequent efforts. Last, it takes up the question of “What now?” arguing that the issue of social reproduction in education and society remains highly relevant but that its study requires new conceptual tools as well as a reworking of old findings and insights. Two central theses inform the overall argument. The first is that to understand social reproduction we have to consider multiple levels of social and institutional structure as well as microanalytic communicative processes and cultural practices. The second is that social class matters profoundly but that analysts struggle to understand its protean nature, including its intricate interplay with other principles of inequality, such as race and gender.

ECONOMIC REPRODUCTION

Althusser's (1971) essay on “Ideological State Apparatuses” was an early and influential argument about education and social reproduction. It conceptualized the school as an agency of class domination, achieving its effects through ideological practices that inculcated knowledge and dispositions in class-differentiated social subjects, preparing them for their dominant or dominated places in the economy and society. The foundational work on economic reproduction, however, was *Schooling in Capitalist America* (Bowles & Gintis 1976). In this account, classroom experience, and school knowledge more generally, emphasized

discrete bits of knowledge and discipline for those bound for blue-collar occupations, alongside more synthetic, analytic knowledge and self-directedness for those destined for middle-class professions. It provided a straightforward argument in which school curricula and classroom procedure reflected the organization of class-differentiated adult dispositions, skills, and work experiences and transmitted similar dispositions and skills to subsequent generations. The argument quickly attracted criticism, in part because it maintained considerable distance conceptually and empirically from actual schools and classrooms (Giroux 1983). However, the basic thesis that schooling as a system rations kinds of knowledge to class- and ethnically-stratified student populations has been empirically confirmed by a number of studies (Anyon 1981, 1997; Carnoy & Levin 1985; Oakes 1985). Published in translation at about the same time, *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) dealt with France. It provided a more nuanced analysis, both in its framework, which related forms of symbolic value (economic, cultural, and social “forms of capital”) to economic and political arenas, and in its attention to forms of pedagogic discourse, which hypothesized systemic miscommunication in classrooms (1977, Chapter 2). It also attracted many critics of its “determinism” (Giroux 1983, Levinson & Holland 1996) because it argued that class-based differences in material resources were ultimate causes in the reproduction of cultural and educational inequality.

According to critics, a primary deficiency in all the early formulations was their neglect of the problem of agency and change (Giroux 1983, MacLeod 1987). Instructive criticism in this regard is provided by Apple (1982). As does *Schooling in Capitalist America*, this work takes as its starting point that certain shared principles govern the organization of schooling and work. It argues that in essence schooling is organized to provide individuated, technical knowledge to select strata of consumer-workers (largely white, middle class, and compliant). The abstract and schematic treatment of

social dynamics and the education process is enriched, however, by Apple's argument that "cultures and ideologies" are "filled with contradiction" and "produced...in contestation and struggle." (pp. 24, 26). In support of this argument, Apple turns to sociological case studies and educational ethnographies. The first of these address adults in work situations and show, for example, male factory workers and female salespeople as they slow down, disrupt, and otherwise exert informal control over work processes. Such studies document how class-situated practices of resistance subvert the formal procedures and control mechanisms of the workplace bureaucracy (see also Scott 1998, pp. 310–11).

The ethnographic studies Apple discusses focus on class conflicts in society and in relation to school. One of these, Willis's *Learning to Labor* (1977), is a classic because of its detailed observation of peer group behavior and its provocative theorization of cultural agency and reproduction. The study examines how working-class English lads penetrate the school's meritocratic ideology. Through peer group solidarities analogous to their fathers' shop-floor tactics for controlling the flow of factory work, they disrupt classroom procedure with humor and aggression, ubiquitously calling into question the classroom social contract whereby compliance is exchanged for knowledge and grades. They celebrate masculine solidarity and power through partying, fighting, and "having a laff"; they also oppress girls, deride ethnoracial minorities, and fail in school. Another study is McRobbie's (1978) "Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity." It is an ethnographic analysis of both class and sexuality, theorized as structures of domination that are lived as partially autonomous cultural formations, zones of practice and meaning wherein working-class girls assert femininity and sexuality against the prudish compliance expected of good girls in school. Like their working-class mothers, these girls form bonds of self and solidarity through gender expression, but they also disengage from schooling and its prospects of

social mobility and enact self-limiting rituals of sexual subordination.

In these two studies, rather than reproductive processes that involve congruence across multiple levels of organizations and actors (e.g., by parents, teachers, and education bureaucracies), we instead find oppositional practices that nonetheless reproduce social relations. We have sophisticated accounts of how the winner loses. Adolescent class- and gender-based solidarities draw from parental legacies of class and gender struggles, and the students building these solidarities develop considerable insight into the selective, class-biased nature of school curriculum and normative classroom conduct. They disrupt the logic of schooling, but their group- and practice-based insights are limited "penetrations" (Willis 1977, chapters 5 and 6) because their class expressions also reinforce ethnoracial antagonism, gender oppression, and educational failure.

Carnoy & Levin (1985) share Apple's emphasis on education as a site of class conflict and social contradiction, and they emphasize the role of the state. They argue that schooling serves primarily as an instrument of class domination but that it is also a site of struggles for equality. As does Apple, they also turn to ethnographies to understand reproductive processes, focusing on comparative ethnographic studies of schools serving upper- and lower-middle-class communities in California. Analyzing teacher beliefs and classroom practices regarding work-relevant knowledge and dispositions; parental views of schooling, their children, and their occupational futures; and state education criteria for adequate and nonadequate performance on core subjects, they find a lockstep pattern of teacher and parental beliefs, classroom practices, and state performance criteria that "reinforce the differential class structure in preparing the young for future occupational roles" (p. 141).

Lareau's *Home Advantage* (1989) provides a further perspective on class conditions and school experiences, focusing especially on families. It comparatively analyzes how working

and middle class adults with elementary-age children view education and interact with school, thus influencing their children's school experiences. Lareau finds that what might be called work process shapes families' tacit theories of the home/school relation. Does parents' office work come home with them? If so, expect (middle-class) parents and children to perceive and enact many home/school connections. Does parental work end at the factory gate or retail shop door? If so, expect (working-class) parents and children to perceive and enact a clear separation of home and school, viewing school as the place for schooling and home as a needed respite. The study reports a salient home advantage: Middle-class parents, especially mothers, are avid and effective school minders. When well-resourced, school-confident women set the standard for normal parenting, their blue-collar counterparts inevitably lag behind. School personnel often view working-class parents as insufficiently involved in their children's education (Freeman 2004, Luttrell 1997, Thompson 1995).

CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

Lareau uses the concept of cultural capital to analyze cultural knowledge as class advantage in educational areas. This concept, from Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984, Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), has been applied in numerous studies of social advantage and classroom processes (e.g., Collins 1999a, Heller 1994, Nespore 1987). Key extended works on cultural reproduction focused on the relative autonomy of cultural forms and practices vis-à-vis political economy, investigating the interplay of class with other significant social relations, especially those of gender and race. They often analyze how social relations are produced and reproduced in encounters between adolescents and their peers in a variety of school settings, including classrooms.

Foley's (1990) *Learning Capitalist Culture* proposes to show "how schools are sites for popular cultural practices that stage or reproduce social inequality" (p. xv). It reports

on a south Texas town and high school in the ferment of 1970s civil rights reforms. Investigating the dynamics of class in relation to other axes of inequality, it analyzes the staging and reproducing of class and racial hierarchies at multiple sites: football games, the dating scene, beer parties, and classrooms. Foley argues that class relations take priority over ethnic affiliations but that class is expressive rather than structural in the usual sense. More particularly, he argues that middle-class Anglo and Latino cohorts, of athletes and other popular cliques, share greater commonalities in their presentation of self (Goffman 1959, 1967), whether in classrooms or elsewhere, than they share with ostensible working-class counterparts, whether Anglo "shitkickers" or Chicano "vatos." In this account, capitalist culture is fundamentally "communicative action" (Habermas 1987), and class culture is a "situational speech performance" (pp. 178–81, 192–94) enacted and learned in many places, including the classroom; it crosscuts and informs the staging and reproduction of ethnic identities. Essentially, middle-class expressive culture is highly instrumental: Middle-class kids, whether Anglo or Chicano, play the classroom "game," appearing interested while discreetly mocking teacher authority and school knowledge. Working-class expressive culture is less strategic for various reasons: Working-class kids do not play the classroom game as well; they are either passive and exclude themselves from classroom interaction or openly defiant and likely to provoke confrontations with teachers.

What adds additional substance to Foley's ethnography of social reproduction is its companion analysis *From Peones to Politicos* (Foley 1988), a historical treatment of the changing political economy of the town and region in which the more detailed school/community study is situated. This study analyzes the broad movement of adult Chicanos from field laborers to civil rights advocates, as the region's economy transforms over an 80-year period from feudalized ranching to modern capitalist agriculture. It shows the space made for an expanded Latino middle class, investigates the role of public

institutions such as schools in class-stratified ethnic social mobility, and provides the broader compass for the social scenes, institutional processes, and face-to-face conduct explored in *Learning Capitalist Culture*.

Despite its strengths, Foley's analysis of capitalist culture gave short shrift to questions of gender (Collins 1992). Other studies have addressed this lack; a pair by Weis is particularly valuable. *Working Class Without Work* (Weis 1990) takes up issues of gender, race, and aspiration in the context of identity, social movements, feminism, and class restructuring. It examines how white high-school students in "Freeway," a working-class suburb of Buffalo, New York, in the throes of late 1980s deindustrialization and job loss, phrase their aspirations, behave in classrooms, and relate to each other on the basis of their gender and race. The study calls for attention to the production of class identities, rather than the reproduction of class conditions. It argues that social movements of feminism and New Right populism inform female and male responses to the loss of traditional working-class livelihoods, deeply influencing the meaning of school and providing alternative, conflicting paths of identity formation. In particular, girls are analyzed as proto-feminists, aspiring to education and socially mobile work independent of the patriarchal domination endured by their mothers and grandmothers; they do not have the resentment of institutional authority that boys have. Boys, for their part, seem more attuned to a social conservative agenda; they aspire to a restoration of their fathers' world of good wages and good jobs with the women at home, and they avoid and resist schoolwork and teacher authority. *Working Class Without Work* portrays class formation in a time of uncertain transition (the late 1980s), arguing that class legacies of underachievement in schooling can be reshaped by social movements that speak to gender and racial as well as class identities.

Class Reunion (Weis 2004) is a follow-up investigation conducted with many of the women and men originally studied as students at Freeway High. The heart of *Class Reunion* is

an analysis of class in relation to both gender and race dynamics in an era of global economic reconstruction. Talking with earlier research participants about their adult lives, Weis finds predictable outcomes as well as instructive surprises. Few of the men have successfully pursued tertiary education; with the ongoing loss of industrial work, most make livings in lower-wage service-sector jobs. Many of the women have completed college and hold white-collar jobs, challenging assumptions that family background simply predicts educational attainment. Weis finds—unexpectedly—that many men have given up their aspirations to the patriarchal authority and privilege embedded in an earlier white, working-class masculinity. They have opted of necessity for domestic partnerships in which economic resources are shared along with domestic work, including child care. But this kinder, gentler domestic realm shows a harsher face to the outside world: These men and women forge new domestic alliances as whites, protecting "their communities" from African Americans and "Arabs" (Weis 2004).

Those "Arabs," whom Weis's research participants see as racial others, are predominantly of Yemeni origin. Yemeni immigrants are also the subjects of Sarroub's (2005) *All American Yemeni Girls*, a study of high-school girls who are members of a working-class immigrant community in Dearborn, Michigan. The contrasts of site and study are instructive. Sarroub finds very different gender dynamics in this working-class community. In the 1990s, there appears to have been plenty of factory work in Dearborn, supporting a multigenerational Yemeni community that is devoutly Islamic and starkly patriarchal. In Sarroub's analysis, school-focused, society-wide cultural reproduction of the sort proposed by Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) is rejected. Schools are not the site of social reproduction; instead classrooms are "an oasis" where talk flows relatively freely between girl and boy, Yemeni and native-born American, and where educational achievement is sought and aspirations flower. Home and community are where diasporic Yemeni identities are reinforced through transnational

marital strategies; a locally construed Muslim faith entails a very close monitoring of female dress, speech, and conduct; and achievement in school is appreciated but firmly subordinated to marriage and family. Documenting “the religious and cultural traditions that are in fact reproduced and reconstructed within the Yemeni family, and by the girls,” Sarroub convincingly shows that “cultural tools and traditions may have little bearing on learning and achievement [in school] but may serve the purpose of easing cultural or religious tensions as home and school worlds collide” (p. 12). Some outcomes of that collision—desperation as high-school graduation approaches, flight from family, and ostracism from community for girls who do choose education and jobs over submission to patriarchal authority—are sober reminders that identity can be anguished as well as reassuring and that the meanings of class, gender, and race vary widely.

This variation and its challenges for social analysis are central issues in Bettie’s (2003) *Women Without Class*. Studying Latina and Anglo adolescents, Bettie documents that working-class style and demeanor were both sexualized and racialized. School personnel judged working-class Anglos and Latinas as overly sexualized; both girls and school personnel saw upwardly mobile Latina girls as “acting white” (pp. 83–86). Theoretically focused on the interplay of class, gender, and race, Bettie argues that class should be understood as both performance and performative. It is performance because there is an indirect fit between background and style: Some working-class and middle-class “performers” depart from family origins. It is performative because family and community origins constrain the class expressions with which people are comfortable: Class expressivity is “an effect of social structure” (pp. 49–56). Examining working-class Latinas’ expressivity, she explores how class is deflected into sexuality, negatively judged by school personnel, feeding into curriculum tracking processes that lead these “class performers” to working-class futures (chapter 3).

LINGUISTIC REPRODUCTION

Language pervades formal education as the primary means of teaching and learning (Cazden 2001). As shown by the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, as well as some of the work on cultural reproduction just reviewed, language is also a primary means of expressing social identities, affiliating with cultural traditions, and building relations with others (Gee 2001, Harris & Rampton 2003, Schieffelin & Ochs 1986). A third major approach to social reproduction has focused on language and communication conduct in and out of schools, and with such studies we see the emergence of research into public debates about schools and society, often with unintended consequences.

Bernstein provided the major early theoretical and empirical work arguing for the role of class and language in social reproduction (Bernstein 1960, 1964, 1975). Briefly, he argued that the experience of work process reinforces kinds of family role relations, themselves realized as discursive identities that are carried by “elaborated” and “restricted” codes (1964). The codes are seen as the “genes of social class,” the semiotic-communicative sources of identities that are congruent with or disjunctive from the expressive styles required in school (Bernstein 1986, p. 472). Because of its schematic formulation of relations between classes and codes and its uptake in American debates about “cultures of poverty” and “linguistic deficit,” Bernstein’s account attracted much criticism (see Atkinson 1985, Collins 1988, Edwards 1976 for reviews).

Bernstein’s early work on language and class had been picked up in the 1960s by American researchers who argued that poor people, especially poor African Americans concentrated in cities, performed inadequately in school because they were linguistically or culturally deprived (Bereiter & Englemann 1966, Deutsch 1967). This began the first iteration of controversies over linguistic deprivation explanations for educational failure. Anthropologists and other critics of the deficit model argued that minorities did poorly in school not because

of their language per se but because they were treated differently in schools (Leacock 1969, 1971; Rist 1970).

Functions of Language in the Classroom (Cazden et al. 1972) is an influential response to the deficit arguments in which linguistic anthropologists, socially minded psychologists, sociologists, and educators investigate the relationships between group-based communicative styles and classroom interactional dynamics that might lead to poor educational outcomes. Among the contributors, Bernstein (1972) criticizes facile notions of compensatory education, and Hymes (1972) argues for the need to investigate community-specific “communicative competencies” underlying language use that might be perceived as deficient in classroom settings. Some contributions analyze ethnically grounded preferences for collaborative approaches to socializing and learning, including Hawaiian-American traditions of “talk story” (Boggs 1972) and Native American preferences for peer-based “participation structures” (Philips 1972); others explore stigmatizing assumptions about Standard English versus other languages (Spanish) or varieties (Black English), which result in differential treatment in classrooms (Gumperz & Hernandez-Chavez 1972, Mitchell-Kernan 1972). The volume established a standard for arguments about communicative differences, which departed from middle-class white and school-based practice but had an underlying logic or rationale. Many findings led to additional research and analysis, either confirming and elaborating the original phenomena (Au 1980, Erickson & Mohatt 1992, Philips 1983) or applying concepts to new domains, such as literacy learning (Michaels 1981) and mathematics instruction (O’Connor & Michaels 1996).

The major contribution in this tradition, however, is Heath’s (1983) *Ways With Words*. It melds Bernstein’s concerns with work, socialization, language, and schooling and the linguistic anthropological concerns with community-based differences in communicative style that appeared to influence classroom processes and learning outcomes. The book

painstakingly analyzes three different communities in the Carolina Piedmont: a mixed-race middle-class cohort of “Townspeople”; a black working-class neighborhood of “Trackton”; and a white working-class neighborhood of “Roadville.” It documents striking differences in language and literacy socialization among the three groups, relates these differences to expectations about language held by classroom teachers and embedded in school curriculum, and compellingly argues that ethnographic inquiry by research participants (children and teachers) can lessen the mismatch between home and school. Despite its strengths, the book is circumspect about the perpetuation of race and class inequalities clearly implied by its findings, perhaps in part owing to methodological modesty, but also in part because it ignores power relations, in particular, the larger state-level political forces that roll back the classroom reforms, which are only mentioned in a final Postscript (Collins & Blot 2003, chapters 3 and 5; de Castell & Walker 1991).

Drawing on the now-established school/home mismatch framework, a series of studies in the 1980s and early 1990s closely examined teacher-student and student-student interaction to demonstrate disadvantages faced by working-class African American students in standard classroom literacy lessons (Collins 1986; Gee 1996; Michaels 1981, 1986) and the advantages of classroom innovation (Foster 1987, Lee 1993). Others drew similar conclusions from analyses of community-based “funds of knowledge” possessed by working-class Latino students but largely ignored by public schools (Gonzalez et al. 2005, Moll et al. 1992). Few studies in this period explicitly thematized the reproductive aspects of class- or race-inflected classroom encounters with literacy (Bigler 1996; Collins 1988, 1989).

In early 1997, however, a second iteration of the linguistic deprivation debate occurred after the Oakland Unified School District proposed to treat Ebonics (African American Vernacular English) as a classroom language resource. In making sense of the firestorm of protest this proposal unleashed, analysts

drew on the *Functions of Language* tradition of trying to understand community-based ways of speaking as resources for learning (Delpit & Perry 1998). They also pointed to the larger cultural-political processes that systematically devalued African American Vernacular (i.e., working-class) ways with words (Baugh 2000). Some explicitly treated it as an ideological conflict that revealed the reproductive nature of standard school language hierarchies and procedures in the United States (Collins 1999b) and internationally (Long 2003).

In recent years, the ways in which linguistic differences correlate with class differences have been getting renewed attention because of debates about school reform and the failure of the Bush administration's *No Child Left Behind* mandates and programs (No Child Left Behind Act 2001). This is an ambitious national intervention in public education that was supposed to change long-standing patterns of educational inequality but has not done so (Rothstein 2007, Tough 2006). In the search for explanations and alternatives, research making linguistic difference or deficit arguments is being considered in policy discussions and schools reforms. This development has largely escaped published discussion in anthropology (but see Bomer et al. 2008).

Two studies are relevant for our discussion because of the substance of their claims and the way they have been picked up in policy debates. Both studies provide accounts of class-based differences in language and interactional dispositions and argue why they matter for schooling. Hart & Risley's (1995) *Meaningful Differences* is a study of child socialization, based on a substantive, longitudinal sampling of language use in family settings. It makes strong claims about social class and language use, and it has had influential uptake in discussions of compensatory literacy programs for poor children. The book is explicitly cast as a dialogue with Bernstein's claims about class and code, and the analysis concentrates on the amount of vocabulary, specific sentence types, and specific interactional features of talk directed to children in "professional," "working-class" and "welfare"

homes during their infant, preschool, and early primary years. Hart & Risley argue that the cumulative vocabulary differences they found have direct effects on early literacy. Although no commentators seem to have noticed, the specific literacy measures they study do not support their claim, nor do their findings show a regular class distribution. Compounding the problem of the flawed analysis of class and language, Hart & Risley subsequently simplified their results and promoted them in policy discussions as a "catastrophic" linguistic disadvantage for the poor (Hart & Risley 2003), and this version of findings has been used to justify strict pedagogical regimes aimed at the inner-city poor (Brook-Gunn et al. 2003, Tough 2006).

Lareau's (2003) *Unequal Childhoods* is a more measured work investigating child-rearing practices among poor, working-class, and affluent, professional white and black families living in Philadelphia and its suburbs. It supports and elaborates Bernstein's and Heath's arguments about class and language socialization, showing a disjuncture between poor and working-class language practices and those expected in public arenas such as school or the (white-collar) workplace. It also explores how the differences in child-rearing are rooted in class-based cultural models that unite ideas about parents, children, and learning. Middle-class families believe in "concerted cultivation," whereas their working-class counterparts view child development as akin to "natural growth" (Lareau 2003, chapter 1; see Heath 1983, chapters 3 and 7 for evidence of similar beliefs). The professional patterns go together with school achievement, the working-class patterns do not, and these class differences supersede otherwise notable white/black differences. Lareau is frank about the "power of class" (Chapter 12) in shaping child language socialization, schooling experiences, and life chances, and although her findings are not part of a deficit argument, they have been picked up in the same commentary as those of Hart & Risley.

There is reason to take *Meaningful Differences* (Hart & Risley 1995) seriously. Stripped of its alarmist rhetoric and read closely, the

study reports findings commensurable with those of Lareau (2003) and Heath (1983) and the body of work in England supporting Bernstein's early arguments (Cook-Gumperz 1973, Hawkins 1977). The recurrent deprivation debates, which have not ended, are an indication of the difficulties of understanding the dynamic interactions among racial formations, class conditions, and language. The fact that the most recent iteration of the debate has attracted little attention from sociolinguists or linguistic anthropologists calls to mind Hymes's (1972) observation regarding Bernstein in the 1970s:

Bernstein is in the complex, difficult position of defending a kind of communication he calls a "restricted code" and of insisting on its limitations. His position will please few. Those who defend children by placing all blame on the schools, and those who explain the failures of schools by the language of the children, will both be offended. (p. xlv)

THE TURN FROM REPRODUCTION AND THE CURRENT SCENE

The "difficult position" to which Hymes refers has largely been abdicated. Although there are exceptions, by the late 1980s efforts to understand social reproduction in classrooms and schools had largely been abandoned. This was not because social inequality had lessened in the latter part of the twentieth century; indeed, as numerous analysts have demonstrated, it has increased in the United States and internationally since the early 1970s (Henwood 2003, Kuttner 2007), but concern with reproduction as a conceptual focus was set aside in favor of other approaches. Instead analysts have given priorities that emphasize individual or group initiative—"agency," "identity," "person," and "voice"—over the structural constraints of political economy or linguistic code. Economic reproduction models, the first formulated, were also the first criticized, most pointedly for neglecting the role of ethnoracial formations and gender relations in capitalist

political economies and class relations (Bettie 2003, Foley 1990, Weis 1990).

The difficulties of formulating multifaceted accounts of race, class, and gender in relation to schooling have been formidable, however, and the new directions are informative for both their achievements and their limitations. Weis (1990) argued for a shift away from analyzing class reproduction to analyzing identity formation, and her subsequent study (2004) supports the earlier argument that schools are not simply about reproducing class relations to education. However, it does not show that social movements posited in 1990 as sources of identity formation do in fact serve such a role; the discussion of ideology and consciousness is the weakest part of the latter work. The collection in Levinson et al. (1996) represents an anthropological option, arguing against cultural reproduction models as too deterministic and for the priority of the "cultural production of person" in schools, with a wider diversity of kinds of person than is allowed by the broad social categories of class, race, and gender. It is not clear, however, whether their project of studying the schooled production of persons has continued. Bettie (2003) explicitly analyzes class in relation to gender and race, and her conceptualizing class as "performance" and "performativity" moves forward the study of class-as-expression (see also Rampton 2006). However, although she argues against reproductionist accounts, she reports outcomes of class-expressive behavior very similar to Willis's and McRobbie's findings—that is, while dismissing reproduction models, she presents straightforward reproductive outcomes (Bettie 2003, chapter 3).

On the language front, there has been a dramatic turning away from models of structure and code (Rampton et al. 2008), and this has left a troubling situation. On the one hand, there are currently very sophisticated accounts of practice, semiosis, and indeterminacy in the relation between language and social order; on the other hand, the new approaches would appear to have little to say about the substantive projects, just discussed, that report strong links between class background and language

use. This aversion to social reproduction analysis can be seen in a recent *Annual Review* essay. Wortham (2008) presents a cogent account of the “Linguistic Anthropology of Education.” What is notable in his treatment of this field is the emphasis on the contextual indeterminacy of language use, on the constructed, contested nature of language ideologies, and in general on the creative, flexible aspect of social life in educational settings. This is not so much wrong as it is one sided. He presents a “compositionist” view of social orders (Kontopoulos 1993), acutely aware of language use by persons and creativity in small group processes, but inattentive to the nature of institutions and vague about hierarchy or power. Thus studies addressing ethnic inequalities are lauded for avoiding “simple reproductionist accounts” (Erickson & Schultz 1982) and for not arguing “simply that minority languages are devalued” (Rampton 1995) (Wortham, 2008, p. 42). Research that deals with language ideologies that organize nation-state hierarchies of language, class, and ethnorace (Blommaert 1999, Heller 1999), is euphemistically described as showing that “language policies . . . differentially position diverse populations” (Wortham 2008, p. 44). Discussing an analysis of narrative and identity among Latino dropouts in an alternative school in Southern California (Rymes 2001), Wortham stresses the speakers’ narrative creativity but omits any mention of the author’s sobering discovery that despite rich hybrid narratives, alternative schools can be quickly shut down by higher administrative powers (Rymes 2001, chapter 9). In brief, this linguistic anthropology of education is attuned to the performative dimensions of language use, but not to structural constraint or social conflict.

CONCLUSION

A federally commissioned study in the 1960s sought to determine the influence of schools in educational attainment and occupational outcomes. It found that differences among schools mattered much less than assumed and that family socioeconomic status was the strongest

influence on a child’s educational achievement and life chances (Coleman 1966). More than four decades later, that generalization still holds (Jencks & Phillips 1998, Kingston 2000, U.S. Dep. Educ. 2001); furthermore, this pattern is found in most nations (Lemke 2002). This is a sobering feature of our world, and efforts to understand such enduring social and educational inequality have occupied a wide range of scholars. The Marxian paradigm of social reproduction provided one angle on the question but arguably proved both too narrow (excluding gender and race) and too rigid (failing to account for agency or identity). But efforts to go beyond this framework—studying class identity as a result of social movements, drawing on performance theory, or stressing the contextual creativity of language in educational settings—have not provided comprehensive accounts that enable us better to understand the gross distribution of class-linked statuses and resources. Although this is a stalemate, there are lessons to be learned. Here are two worth thinking about.

First, it is necessary to conceptualize and study multiple social levels to understand mechanisms that might produce such large-scale structural inequality. The need to move beyond a micro-macro dichotomy of individual and society has been long-established (Bourdieu 1977, Ortner 1993); there are now sophisticated, theoretically and empirically robust accounts of “heterarchical structures” (Kontopoulos 1993) that presume neither bottom-up construction of the social world by aggregate individual action nor top-down determination by large-scale entities but allow instead for emergence over time and complex feedback among structures and processes. Such approaches are needed to understand the internal ecologies of educational systems or the external relations between schools and other social institutions, such as families. Regarding the internal ecologies, heterarchical models can help formulate the place of classrooms and schools in larger educational systems, as a structured but not predetermined process, shedding light on studies of schools as sites of innovation and resistance that can quickly be reversed by higher

bureaucratic levels, as both Heath (1983) and Rymes (2001) discover. Such models can also provide insight into organizational and interactive processes that produce class-differentiated curricula, which have such inequalitarian outcomes (Anyon 1981, 1997; Carnoy & Levin 1985, Leacock 1969, Oakes 1985). Regarding the external relationships between schools and other social institutions, such as families, heterarchical models are needed to analyze the interplay between schools and social-class-based dispositions to intervene in schools (Lareau 1989, 2003); between such class-based dispositions and the disabling stigma of working-class parents, especially mothers (Freeman 2004, Luttrell 1997, Thompson 1995); or between the class-specific, family-inculcated gender expressivity and school tracking decisions (Bettie 2003, Luttrell 1996).

Second, understanding reproductive processes requires alertness to patterns that become evident only over longer periods of time. Some patterns follow the school year. For example, classroom processes such as formal lessons show a structured interplay among immediate face-to-face exchanges, event-level topical coherences, and such things as patterns of differential response to vernacular speech or second languages that unfold over the course of a year (Bartlett 2007, Collins 1996); the acquisition of problematic identities in schools (as, say, “troublemaker” or “learning disabled”) is a process that occurs in face-to-face exchanges as they occur over time and across multiple institutional domains (as Wortham 2008 insightfully dis-

cusses; see also Rogers 2003, Wortham 2006). Other patterns reveal themselves in what might be called the time of the life course. Weis’s (2004) discovery of the significance of gender both for working-class educational attainment and the reworking of family organization depended on a longitudinal research strategy that followed high-school students into their adult lives. It would be valuable to have such a perspective on the life trajectories of Sarroub’s (2005) research participants, allowing us to see whether their plight is transitional or enduring. This question brings us to the issue of the temporality of more abstract political and economic processes as they bear on more tangible cultural dynamics. Heightened diasporization—as described by Sarroub—seems to be a characteristic of the contemporary globalization, now some three to four decades into its course (Friedman 2003). Foley’s (1990) study of reproductive class cultures derives its insight into interplay of class and ethnicity in school settings and other social arenas in part because of the companion study (Foley 1988) analyzing the community’s transitions over an 80-year period.

Attention to multilevel processes and alertness to differing time frames would show that reproductive processes need not be simple to be systematic, nor to be consequential over the long term. Despite theoretical and methodological advances of work in the postreproduction period, there is much to be done to understand how social inequality results from the interplay of classrooms, schools, and the wider society.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to many people who contributed to this review: Greg Urban, who responded to an early prospectus, raising useful questions about scope; Laura Hallgren Flynn, who provided a number of stimulating references and insights into the changing nature of “linguistic reproduction” in classroom contexts and wider educational arenas; Fiona Thompson, who listened to many

ideas-in-progress and carefully read a presubmission draft; and Rosa Collins, who provided valuable (paid) clerical assistance compiling the large bibliography.

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