

TEACHING RESISTANT KOORI STUDENTS

Towards Non-Reproductive Education

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Geoff Munns

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines curriculum and classroom practices in an inner city primary school. It reveals how the curriculum is influenced by students' oppositional behaviour at a whole school and classroom level, and how teachers' responses to oppositional behaviour result in a curriculum which is implicated in the continuing educational disadvantage of a large group of the school's Koori (Aboriginal) students. The theoretical underpinnings of the thesis are drawn from resistance theory. However, the thesis offers a different perspective on previous research in this tradition by focussing on the perspectives of teachers and closely examining the nature of the school curriculum. Students' positions are explored through community and teacher interviews and through school and classroom observation. The data and the discussion focus on curriculum and classroom practices produced in the exchange between the school's Koori students and the teachers.

Koori students are the largest ethnic group in the school. They generally provide most school and classroom opposition, and have the lowest academic standards. For these reasons these Koori students are the specific focus of the research. It is argued that this curriculum contributes to social reproduction by not eliminating the conditions of resistance contained within the school and its context. In this thesis it is theorised that conditions of resistance are brought about by an oppressed position in an unequal society and a consciousness of that position, by student rejection of inequality in the educational paradigm and by community support for that rejection.

The first chapter reviews relevant literature and shows how this thesis builds on the strengths of resistance theory. The value of considering the oppositional behaviour of primary school students and teachers' responses to that behaviour within the research site is also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 2 discusses and justifies the research methodology which is based on an ethnographic approach, involving participant observation, interviews and a review of relevant school documents. The data is presented in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 introduces the school and traces curriculum development over a fifteen year period. Its specific focus is on changes

made to the school's ethos and curriculum in an attempt to cater better for the Koori students, the majority of whom were opposing the school and classroom. Chapter 4 examines the Koori students' responses to education. These are examined through the perceptions of teachers and community members, and through school and classroom observation. Community themes are seen to affect the relationships the Koori students have with their school, teachers and classroom curriculum. Chapter 5 looks at how teachers respond to the oppositional behaviour of the Koori students and the nature of the curriculum forged given the teachers' responses.

The data is analysed in Chapter 6. It is argued that there are conditions of resistance present within the school and its context, and these are linked with the continuation of the school's socially reproductive curriculum. The analysis pinpoints the school's failure to improve the educational outcomes of its Koori students. Chapter 7 briefly summarises the thesis, draws some conclusions and suggests implications for schools serving similar communities to the research context.

RELEVANT PUBLICATION

Hatton, E. J., Munns, G., and Nicklin Dent, J. (1996) Teaching Children in Poverty: Three Australian Primary School Responses. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 17, 1, pp. 39-52.

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