COMPARATIVE EDUCATION AND THE 'NEW' SOCIOLOGIES

ANDREW R. TRUSZ and SANDRA L. PARKS-TRUSZ

Abstract – The authors examine the impact of the 'new' sociologies on comparative education by reviewing five comparative readers published during the past twenty years. While the 'new' sociologies have had considerable impact within sociology and the sociology of education, minimal impact is found within comparative education. The authors further show that while critical new sociologies such as Marxism, neo-Marxism, and Critical theory have had some penetration into comparative education, use of the interpretative sociologies such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and semiotics has generally been absent. The authors conclude by suggesting that a synthesis of the critical and interpretative modes would prove fruitful for further work in comparative education.

Theorie, zwar etwas in die vergleichende Erziehungswissenschaft eingedrungen sind, die interpretativen, wie symbolischer Interaktionismus, Ethnomethodologie und Semiotik, dagegen im allgemeinen kaum Eingang gefunden haben. Nach Ansicht der Autoren würde sich eine Synthese der kritischen und interpretativen Modelle als fruchtbar für weitere Forschung auf dem Gebiet der vergleichenden Erziehungswissenschaft erweisen.


**Sociology: Old and 'New'**

A relationship exists between sociological modes of inquiry and comparative education. Concepts central to comparativists’ work, such as selection, mobility, educational access, development, sex roles, etc., as well as much of the data and methodologies used in discussing these concepts derive, at least in part, from sociology. Given this relationship, our purpose herein is to examine the degree to which the questions and methodologies of the ‘new’ sociologies have influenced comparative education in terms of five prominent readers used in comparative education over the past twenty years.

The ‘new’ sociologies refer to modes of inquiry in sociology which have been developed, revised, or again become viable alternatives to the positivism implicit in the functionalist perspectives which dominated American sociology, at least, until the 1960’s. While the functionalist perspective focuses on the functional requisite or ‘needs’ of social systems that must be met if the system is to survive, it does so within a framework of shared values. These shared values, capsulized in Parsons’ pattern variables, represent a restatement of the ‘modernism’ central to positivistic sociology – the conviction that the natural and inevitable evolution of society produces increasing differentiation requiring the application of universalistic selection criteria. Within educational sociology, this orientation has resulted in an emphasis on the form and structure of educational systems as they relate to equality of educational opportunity within a differentiated social structure.

The growth of the ‘new’ sociologies is generally understood as a response to the inability of the functionalist perspective adequately to explain social reality. One set of responses to this failure can be found in the Critical sociologies. Certainly the oldest alternative to the positivism endemic in functionalism is found in the Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives. At the risk of belaboring a generally understood point, we feel it is useful at this juncture to point out that while the Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives share with positivism a belief in the existence of laws of social development,