Variations in School Practices on Shaping Adolescent Identities and Interethnic Relations

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Abstract

Using our comparative data on student experiences on interethnic relations as well as their perceptions of being “other/ed” the aim of this lecture is to reveal minority students’ interpretations and responses on their schools’ policies and their teachers’ discourses concerning ethnic and religious diversity. Four strategies of diversity policy and accordingly four types of socio-institutional school contexts are taken into consideration: segregated diversity-blind or “residual schools”, segregated diversity-conscious or “community schools”, integrated diversity-blind and integrated diversity conscious schools. The first subset of student narratives which we analyzed refers to teachers’ fair and unfair attitudes towards minority students, to their stories on different treatment along with typical conflicts at school and around extracurricular activities, touching upon more general questions concerning the schools’ relation to minority students’ and their families’ private life and values. The second subset of student narratives is focused on more general questions concerning the public treatment of diversity, like racism and discrimination, the role of the media, and its coverage of criminality, and finally issues of cultural and religious traditions being seen from one perspective as the most important guarantee of cultural reproduction, while from the other as justification for incompatible lifestyles. Being different is not a continuous experience or issue in minority youngsters’ life and social relations. It comes up in a situational way, largely in ritualised forms of communication. Therefore in the second part of the presentation we will change our focus from discourses and issues of othering to the performative aspects of the everyday interethnic interactions and acts of identifications. We will present four ideal types of performative realization of ‘othering’ in student-student relationship: starting with verbal conflicts or insults using usually derogatory or racist terms, continuing with ethnically or racially framed teasing or joking, through self-confident avoidance or downplay (under-communication) of ethnicity, and finishing with the reactive showing off or over-communication of collective self in ethnic terms, applying often a subversive strategy.