An Abstract of Henry A. Giroux’s “Towards a Postmodern Pedagogy”

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In “Towards a Postmodern Pedagogy,” Henry A. Giroux argues that a critical pedagogy is necessary for maintaining democracy because public education is instrumental in producing politically active citizens, critical citizens must have power over knowledge, and an egalitarian selfhood allows for a multiplicity of narratives to have a voice.

Giroux’s analysis of the lack of political consciousness of American youth leads him to argue that a critical pedagogy in public education is the most viable resolution (384). Beyond simply being the vehicle of knowledge and study, educative systems should produce students with political voices, which is the means for a vigorous democracy (384). Giroux argues that a critical pedagogy empowers students to take social action and defend human equality in the medium of the postmodern world (384-5).

Giroux rejects the construal of knowledge as simply information in favor of new archetypes of knowledge under the power of critical citizens (386). His epistemology utilizes the deconstructionist critique to escape totalizing reason, embrace marginalized knowledge spheres, and to acknowledge the limitation knowledge (386-7). Citizens exercising power/knowledge in socio-politico fields will be able to actualize a transformative humanism of justice (384, 386-7).

The role of the self in this postmodern pedagogy is in an ethic of discourse between the individual and the other in order to promote equality (385). Thus there is reciprocity of meaning between the pedagogical and the political, in that; the learning environment provokes social justice and action (386). This critical pedagogy would be able to examine narratives, not as absolutes, but as doors to a wider democratic conversation (386). Giroux’s political/personal subjectivity resists both identity exploitation and the institutionalization of prejudice (388).

Although a critical pedagogy embraces multiple voices, how can one be developed in a way that avoids a dangerous nationalism that might result in light of America’s visible success?