

Knowledge, Power, and Education

The selected works of Michael W. Apple

Michael W. Apple

1 On Being a Scholar/Activist

An Introduction to Knowledge, Power, and Education

Getting There

Books of collected works are always interesting to me. They require that the author reflect back on a trajectory that may not be totally clear even to the writer herself or himself. They ask a writer to construct a historical narrative that is simultaneously both personal and intellectual/political. In this introductory chapter, I want to engage with this combined task, to reflect on some of the history of the development of my work over time and, at the same time, to situate this development in some of the more personal groundings that might explain how and why the work I've done came about. Let me start with a personal story.

It was late in the evening and I had just come home after a day of teaching—filled with the combination of exhaustion, tension, and sometimes pure joy that accompanies working in schools. There was something waiting for me, a letter from Teachers College (TC), Columbia University. I opened it with much trepidation but the news was good. I was admitted to the Philosophy of Education program there. I had been accepted elsewhere, but this was the 1960s and in my mind “TC” was the place to be if one was deeply interested in challenging the taken for granted assumptions and practices of schooling. To tell you the truth, I was surprised that I had been admitted. I had gone to two small state teachers colleges at night for my undergraduate degree, a degree that was not yet finished since I had to complete some required courses that summer. And, while working full-time as a printer before my part-time undergraduate career was interrupted by the army, my grade point average was, to be honest, pretty horrible. Luckily, TC focused on my post-army last two years of college work.

The army had “trained” me to be a teacher and many urban schools were facing a very serious teacher shortage. Thus, I began teaching without a degree in the inner city schools of Paterson, New Jersey—schools I had attended as a child¹—and then moved to teach in a small rural and strikingly conservative town in southern New Jersey for a number of years where I predictably had some serious conflicts with ultra-conservative and racist groups (see Apple 1999). This fact may partly account for some of the reasons I focused on the growth in power of conservative social and religious movements in education and the larger society in a good deal of my later writing.

I had also been a president of a teachers union, a continuation of a family tradition of political activism.² I loved teaching; but I was more than a little distressed by the ways in which teachers were treated, by curricula that were almost totally disconnected

from the world of the children and communities in which I worked, and by policies that seemed to simply reproduce the poverty that surrounded me. Having grown up poor myself, this was not something that gave me much to be happy about as you might imagine. Taken together, all of this pushed me toward applying for a Masters degree, with the aim of returning to the classroom. But something happened to me at Columbia. I found a way, a "vocation," that enabled me to combine my interests in politics, education, and the gritty materialities of daily life in schools. I ultimately continued on for a doctorate.

Going to TC during the late 1960s was a remarkable experience in many ways. It treated intellectual work seriously and pushed me and others to the limits of what was possible to read and understand. For me, although I was already grounded in an intense family tradition of radical literacy, since I was coming from night school this was one of the first times in my formal educational career that I had been treated as if I could deal with some of the most complicated historical, economic, conceptual, political, and practical issues surrounding education. I loved it but at the very same time was dismayed by it. The reason for the dismay was because TC (and Columbia University as a whole) was basically right next to Harlem and yet its relations with impoverished schools and with the Black and Latino communities nearby were often tense. This very fact provided students like me with a bit of kindling for the gritty anger that many of us already felt. This of course was complemented by the reality that Columbia was a deeply politicized environment at the time. The fact that I had already been an activist in anti-racist, anti-corporate, and anti-war movements meant that the pressure cooker of studying at Columbia had to be balanced with the demands of political action. Somehow I and others did it.

In philosophy of education, I worked with Jonas Soltis, a fine analytic philosopher and teacher, and someone who recognized that there might be something worthwhile in my rough and not yet polished conceptual abilities. But Jonas also recognized that whatever my growing conceptual talents (and they were growing since he was indeed a good teacher), I was chafing at the lack of connection between the world of analytic philosophy and the struggles over curricula, teaching, and community participation in schools. While I was clearly influenced by the analytic work of Ryle, Austin, and especially Wittgenstein, and by the historical treatments of the growth of significant philosophical traditions such as that of John Herman Randall, Jr., Jonas knew almost before I did that my real interests were centered on the politics of curriculum and teaching.

Near the end of my first year at TC, he sent me to see Alice Miel, the Chair of Curriculum and Teaching, and someone whose contributions to democratic curriculum have not been sufficiently recognized. And Alice sent me to see Dwayne Huebner. Her suggestion had a profound impact on all that I have done.

Very few doctoral students had finished with Dwayne. He was exceptionally demanding (of himself as well as his students) and he was among the most creative critical curriculum scholars in the history of the field.³ He said that we needed to rethink all that we thought we knew about society, about schooling, about nearly everything (see, e.g., Huebner 1999). Dwayne sent me away with a list of more than 50 books to read—in philosophy, social theory, literature and literary theory, and curriculum history. For some this would have been off-putting but for some reason, I took up the challenge and we met again—and again and again. I pored over the books. It was a

bewildering array and yet I began to see a pattern, a set of ways in which our common-sense must be and could be challenged. My political and pedagogic commitment to understanding and interrupting common-sense that was so much a part of my political and educational activity earlier and that became the central focus of my work as a scholar/activist throughout my career later on was given direction. If this was a test, I guess I passed it. Dwayne and I spent hours discussing the material. He questioned me; I questioned him. And a mutual bond was built that has lasted for a very long time.

There are specific reasons for my not rejecting the challenging readings that Dwayne demanded that I read. As I will state in one of the chapters included in this book, when I was being trained as a teacher (I use the word trained consciously) and went to one of those small state teachers colleges at night, nearly every course that I took had a specific suffix—"for teachers." I took "Philosophy for Teachers," "World History for Teachers," "Mathematics for Teachers," "Physics for Teachers," and so on. The assumption seemed to be that since I had attended inner city schools in a very poor community and was going back to teach in those same inner city schools, I needed little more than a cursory understanding of the disciplines of knowledge and the theories that stood behind them. Theory was for those who were above people such as me.

There were elements of good sense in this. After all, when I had been taught particular kinds of theory, both at the small state teachers college and even at times later on in my graduate studies, it was all too often totally disconnected from the realities of impoverishment, racism, class dynamics, gendered realities, decaying communities and schools, cultural struggles, and the lives of teachers and community members. But the elements of bad sense, of being intellectually marginalized because of my class background and of so many people like myself being positioned as a "less than," were palpable. For me and many others who grew up poor and who wanted to more fully understand both our own experiences and why schooling, the economy, and indeed the world itself, looked the way they did, the search for adequate explanations became crucial. Learning and using *powerful* theory, especially *powerful critical* theories, in essence, became a counter-hegemonic act. Getting better at such theories, employing them to more fully comprehend the ways in which differential power actually worked, using them to see where alternatives could be and are being built in daily life, and ultimately doing all this in what we hoped were non-elitist ways gave us two things.

First, all of this made the realities of dominance sensible—and at times depressing. But, second, it also provided a sense of freedom and possibility, especially when it was connected to the political and educational actions in which many of us were also engaged. These same experiences could be spoken of by members of many other groups who have been marginalized by race, sex/gender, class, colonialism, and by an entire array of other forms of differential power.

Thus, working with Dwayne Huebner was a deeply formative experience, as was becoming his teaching assistant. Dwayne sent me to The New School for Social Research, a center for radical intellectual work and a home for many of the most influential figures in critical philosophy and social theory, to take courses in phenomenology and critical social and cultural theory. My grounding in critical theory and in the work of Marx, Habermas, Marcuse, and others in that complex tradition can be traced to those experiences at The New School, as can the influence, in particular, of the sociology of knowledge of Alfred Schutz and the radical phenomenological

positions embodied in figures such as Merleau-Ponty. At the same time, I began to read two of the people who had truly major influences on me as my work developed later on—Raymond Williams (see Williams 1961, 1977) and Antonio Gramsci (1971).

Dwayne insisted that I get to know Maxine Greene well, a person who also had a major influence on me. In essence, I did a joint degree in curriculum studies, philosophy, and sociology under the direction of Dwayne, Jonas, and Maxine. This combination led to a dissertation that brought these traditions together, “Relevance and Curriculum: A Study in the Phenomenological Sociology of Knowledge,” at the same time as it provided both the foundation and many of the guiding questions for much of my later work on the relationship among education, knowledge, and power.

Coming to Wisconsin

Dwayne had done his PhD at Wisconsin. He and his close friend, the noted curriculum theorist James MacDonald, told stories of Wisconsin and of their experiences there, compelling stories that documented its excellence, its political tradition, and the ways in which it provided a space for critical work. As I was finishing my degree in the spring of 1970, there was a curriculum studies position open there. Dwayne and Jim’s major professor, Vergil Herrick—originally a colleague of Ralph Tyler at Chicago and one of the leading curriculum scholars of his time—had died and his position needed to be filled. Herbert Kliebard was the other curriculum studies person at Wisconsin. Herb had studied at TC under Arno Bellack—a person with whom I too had taken a number of courses—in the generation before mine. Herb’s work on curriculum history had already made a significant impression on me and others. When he called and an interview was arranged, I was more than a little happy—and filled with a bad case of nerves.

My first experience of Madison, Wisconsin was arriving in the midst of a large anti-war demonstration. The power of the demonstrations (and they continue today), the intellectual and political openness of the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies, the quality of the students there, the progressive political traditions of the state and the community—all of these combined to make me feel that I had found a home. No place is perfect, but Wisconsin continues to be a special place, an institution where I have spent over four decades. Even though I have been a Visiting Professor at many universities nationally and internationally, few have that rare combination of a critical core, an expectation of the organic joining of excellence and political/ethical commitment, and a democratic and participatory ethos that characterize the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Of course, like many places, neoliberal pressures are a threat to this combination of characteristics. But, though not impossible, it will be harder to transform Wisconsin than other institutions.

Knowledge and Power—First Steps

Wisconsin provided the space for truly serious critical work, work that could be engaged. It was an ideal place to be a “scholar/activist.” In the early 1970s, in addition to the other writing I was doing on teacher education, on critical studies of curriculum and evaluation, and on student rights, I began the initial work on a book that was to

take nearly five years to complete, *Ideology and Curriculum* (1979/1990/2004).⁴ (Luckily, I had been given tenure in 1973 after only three years at Wisconsin, and was promoted to full professor after only three more years, so the pressure was off.) The aim of that early book was not only to revitalize the curriculum field, but also to challenge both “liberal” educational policies and practices, and the reductive and essentializing theories of the role of education that had become influential in critical analysis, books such as Bowles and Gintis’s *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976). In *Ideology and Curriculum*, I argued that education must be seen as a political act. I suggested that in order to do this, we needed to think *relationally*. That is, understanding education requires that we situate it back into both the unequal relations of power in the larger society and the relations of exploitation, dominance, and subordination—and the conflicts—that generate and are generated by these relations.

Others had said some of this at the time, but they were all too general. I wanted to focus on the connections between knowledge and power, since in my mind—and in that of many others—cultural struggles were crucial to any serious movements for social transformation. Thus, rather than simply asking whether students have mastered a particular subject matter and have done well on our (all too common) tests, we should ask a different set of questions: Whose knowledge is this? How did it become “official”? What is the relationship between this knowledge and how it is organized and taught, and who has cultural, social, and economic capital in this society? Who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and who does not? What can we do as critical educators and activists to change existing educational and social inequalities, and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just?

During the writing of *Ideology and Curriculum*, I came into contact with a number of people in England who were doing similar critical work on the relationship between knowledge and power. The “New Sociology of Education” in England had nearly exactly the same intuitions and used many of the same resources as critical curriculum studies did in the United States (see, e.g., Young 1971; Dale et al. 1976). As my analyses became popular there, international connections were cemented in place. This led to my first lectures in England in 1976 and created a set of intellectual and political bonds that continue to this day. I am certain that *Ideology and Curriculum* would not have been seen as such a major contribution without the political and academic influences of these colleagues in England, in particular Geoff Whitty, Roger Dale, Madeleine Arnot, Basil Bernstein, and Paul Willis. (This set of interactions and the mutually supportive influences and discussions that have gone on have continued over the years as the Institute of Education at the University of London became something of a “second home” for me and with my appointment as World Scholar and Professor there. Current and past colleagues at the Institute of Education, especially David Gillborn, Deborah Youdell, Stephen Ball, and Geoff Whitty, have kept the tradition of intense debate and friendship alive and well.)

Earlier, I mentioned the kinds of questions that *Ideology and Curriculum* raised. Yet, it is important to state that the book was grounded in a large array of issues and literature. Indeed, *Ideology and Curriculum* enabled me to synthesize a considerable number of the influences that had been working through me for many years. Let me note them here, since many people see such early work as simply an expression of neo-Marxism. It is this, but it was so much more. It rested on such traditions as the following: cultural

Marxism and Marxist theory; phenomenology and in particular, social phenomenology; the sociology of knowledge; analytic philosophy inside and outside of education; European critical theory; the philosophy, sociology, and history of science; aesthetics and the philosophy of art; political economy and studies of the labor process; the new sociology of education in England and France; and last but certainly not least, the critical and literary traditions within education and curriculum studies.

Thus, *Ideology and Curriculum* was meant to speak to a much larger array of educational, social, cultural, and political issues than some might have realized. And it certainly could not be captured by overly simplistic slogans such as curriculum “reconceptualization,” a term with a very weak empirical and historical warrant. I fully recognize that *Ideology and Curriculum* bears the mark of its time. It devotes most of its energy to unpacking the role that curriculum and pedagogy play in cultural reproduction. It is part of a tradition of critical analyses of the “reproduction of dominance” that sits side-by-side with the work of others such as Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein. It spends much less time than it should on a more dialectical understanding of knowledge and power, and because of this, it is not as adequate in understanding transformations and struggles (see Weis et al. 2006). But this subject is taken up in the many books that followed and in the additional material included in the newer editions of *Ideology and Curriculum*, especially in the 25th Anniversary Third Edition, published in 2004. Yet, even with its limitations and silences, the fact that it has gone through multiple editions and revisions, and has been translated into a very large number of languages, means that I must have got something right.

Expanding the Dynamics of Power

Ideology and Curriculum was the first step on what became a long journey—for other books followed regularly as I understood more—as I was taught by the criticisms of other scholars and activists throughout the world and certainly by my doctoral students from all over the world at Wisconsin. (There is a reason I regularly thank the Friday Seminar in each of my books. The PhD and Masters students in that group and the visiting scholars from universities throughout the world who have spent time with both me and the group at Wisconsin, have been more than a little influential in my development and keep me honest at all times.)

Two other books followed—*Education and Power* (1982/1995/2012) and *Teachers and Texts* (1986). This set of books formed what somehow came to be known as the first “Apple trilogy.” The two additional books both corrected some of the errors and spoke to some of the silences in *Ideology and Curriculum* and expanded the dynamics of power with which we had to be concerned to include gender and race (see also Apple & Weis 1983).⁵ They focused not only on the interactions between the economic, political, and cultural spheres and the complicated dynamics of reproduction, but also on the power and contradictions of resistance and struggle both inside schools and in the larger society. They critically examined what was happening in curricular content and form, and in teachers’ labor through a process of deskilling, reskilling, and intensification. They illuminated the political economy of the “real” curriculum in schools—the textbook. And they analyzed the spaces where possible counter-hegemonic action could take place. In this, I was influenced as well by my

interactions with colleagues working at the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

The path I was on now was even more involved, and the relations and realities I was trying to understand were even more complex. These issues demanded more attention. But looking back on the first set of books, I can now see more clearly that they led me from largely neo-Marxist analyses of social and cultural reproduction that were influenced by Gramsci, Williams, and Althusser and by concepts such as hegemony and over-determination (see also Apple 1982), to an (unromantic) emphasis on agency and on the politics and economics of cultural production, to treatments of teachers’ work and lives, to an enlargement of political and cultural struggles to complement (but definitely not abandon) my original focus on class, and more recently to sustained critical analyses of how powerful movements and alliances can radically shift the relationship between educational policies and practices and the relations of dominance and subordination in the larger society, but not in a direction that any of us would find ethically or politically justifiable. All of these efforts over the years have been grounded in a sense of the significance of cultural struggles and of the crucial place that schools, curricula, teachers, and communities play in these struggles.

Understanding Conservative Social Movements in Education

Another series of books followed—this time four books—these focusing much more directly on the ways in which power currently worked and on how we might interrupt these relations. In books such as *Official Knowledge* (1993/2000), *Cultural Politics and Education* (1996), *The State and the Politics of Knowledge* (2003), and *Educating the “Right” Way* (2006a), I spent a good deal of time showing that it is social movements, not educators, who are the real engines of educational transformations. And the social movements that continue to be the most powerful now are more than a little conservative. In essence, I have claimed that if you want to understand how to engage in a successful large-scale pedagogic campaign that changes people’s common-sense about legitimate knowledge, teaching, and evaluation—indeed about schooling in general—examine those people who have actually done it. I certainly hadn’t abandoned my previous concerns with knowledge and power, but I now had better tools. And the politics were now even more pressing since educators all over the world were facing a set of conservative attacks that were deeply damaging to any education worth its name.

In the process of engaging with these issues, I have also had to engage with debates over postmodern and poststructural theories. I have been a consistent critic of the over-statements and loss of historical memory found within some postmodern and poststructural writings in education and the larger literature. However, concerns with identity, the politics of language, the multiplicity of power relations, and contingency, required that I take seriously some of the issues that this literature raised and that I integrate a number of poststructural elements into my conceptual apparatus. As I have said elsewhere, I am not in a church, so I am not worried about heresy. But let me be very clear here. Postmodern and poststructural approaches are *not* replacements for more structural understandings. It is where these traditions “rub against each other” in tense relationships that progress can be made (see Apple 1999; Apple & Whitty 1999). But any analysis that does not deal seriously with exploitation alongside its analysis of

domination—what Nancy Fraser (1997) calls a politics of redistribution as well as a politics of recognition—is deeply limiting. In each of the books I have written I have tried to keep that awareness in the forefront of my thinking (see Apple 2013).

It is this combination and the epistemological, and at times political tensions that exist between and within these traditions, that I think has allowed me to see more clearly the ways in which the politics of common-sense operate. My Gramscian position and the critical edge it brings has some overlaps with some of the elements of poststructural understandings. This may be one of the reasons I have found Stuart Hall's insightful analyses of cultural politics, of race, identity, and nation, and of the rise of rightist movements so useful (see, e.g., Morley & Chen 1996; Apple 2008).

However, I was not only engaged with the debate over “post” positions. As in my earlier work, and very much like Stuart Hall, I also wanted to distance myself from the return of economic and essentializing—and overly rhetorical—positions. For example, there seemed to be a loss of many of the gains that had been made in our understanding of the complexities of class relations within the state and between the state and civil society—as if Althusser, Poulantzas, Jessop, Dale, and others had never written anything of importance. The immensely productive material on the relationship between ideology and identity, on the relationship among culture, identity, and political economy, on the crucial impact of politics, and on the power of social movements that cut across class lines, as well as a number of other issues, was now seen by some to be either a rejection of key tenets of the Marxist and neo-Marxist traditions (the plural is absolutely crucial here), or these advances were said to deal with epiphenomenal concerns. Similar things were (and are) said about such constitutive dynamics as race and gender

On both sides of the Atlantic, a small group of people had mounted attacks on these advances in the name of purifying “the” tradition from the taint of culturalism and from the sin of worrying too much about, say, gender and race at the expense of class. The British version of this simply does not understand the history of the United States and the salience of race as a relatively autonomous and extraordinarily powerful dynamic in the construction and maintenance of its relations of exploitation and domination, and struggles against them.

Like Britain, in the United States there are indeed crucial reasons to deal very seriously with class and the materialities of capitalist relations. However, let me speak very honestly here. As I have worried aloud elsewhere (Apple 2006b), at times this aim of purification feels a bit like posturing, almost as an attempt to situate oneself in a space that says “look at how radical I seem.” Yet such radicalism at times also seems to treat the realities of schools and other cultural and educational sites, and the struggles over them simply rhetorically. It's as if this particular version of seeming radicalism floats in the air above the material and ideological realities of the object of its analysis—education. This is a deeply unfortunate phenomenon, for if the terms critical education and especially “critical pedagogy” are to have any substantive meaning and if they are to avoid becoming simply rhetorical, they need to have a dynamic and ongoing relationship with the actual practice, people, and institutions of education (see Apple et al. 2009).

This situation is puzzling to me, since one would have thought that a truly radical epistemological and political position would be fully grounded in a fundamentally

reflexive relationship with the institutions it is supposedly about. Certainly, this was Marx's and Gramsci's position, as it was for most of the radical traditions in education, cultural analyses, and political economy. Schools, teachers, students, parents, community activist groups, curricula, testing; the list could go on—all of these are shunned as if they were forms of pollution that might dirty the pristine discussion of the social relations of production and class antagonisms. Let me again hasten to stress that critical discussions of the social relations of production and of class antagonism are crucial. No critical analysis can be complete without them. But they should be directly connected to something—the specifics of such things as the labor process of teachers and its relation to class *and* gender *and* race as well as other powerful dynamics, the neoliberal and neoconservative restructuring of our institutions of education, the racialization of educational policy and practice, the politics of official and popular knowledge, the complex and contradictory effects of globalizations (there are different processes, not a single process, at work here) on the ground, and the actual hard and immensely important work of doing counter-hegemonic curricula and teaching in schools and other cultural institutions. Theory is best done when it's about such things, not when it is waving one reading of not very carefully selected texts from the vast writings within these traditions like an iconic talisman floating above the actual struggles both inside and connected to education.

These intellectual and political debates, combined with the very evident and very powerful shift to the Right in social and educational policy in so many countries, provided much of the background for this next series of books on conservative social movements. I will say much more about what follows in a number of the chapters included here. But let me repeat some of the arguments you'll find in the later chapters of this book, since they show where this trajectory had led me for an entire series of recent books. For exactly the same reasons I stated in the previous pages, over the past two decades I have been engaged in a concerted effort to analyze the reasons behind the rightist resurgence—what Roger Dale (Dale 1989/1990) and I call “conservative modernization”—in education and to try to find spaces for interrupting it. My aim has not simply been to castigate the Right, although there is a bit of fun in doing so. Rather, I have also sought to illuminate the dangers, and the elements of good sense, not only bad sense, that are found within what is an identifiable and powerful new “hegemonic bloc” (that is, a powerful set of groups that provide overall leadership to, and pressure on, what the basic goals and policies of a society are). This new rightist alliance is made up of various factions—neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populist religious conservatives, and some members of the professional and managerial new middle class. These are complicated groups, but let me describe them briefly.

This power bloc combines multiple fractions of capital who are committed to neoliberal marketized solutions to educational problems, neoconservative intellectuals who want a “return” to higher standards and a “common culture,” authoritarian populist religious evangelicals and fundamentalists who are deeply worried about secularity and the preservation of their own traditions, and particular fractions of the professionally oriented new middle class who are committed to the ideology and techniques of accountability, measurement, and “management.” While there are clear tensions and conflicts within this alliance, in general its overall aims are in providing the educational conditions believed to be necessary both for increasing international competitiveness,

profit, and discipline and for returning us to a romanticized past of the “ideal” home, family, and school.

I have had a number of reasons for focusing on the alliance behind conservative modernization. First, these groups are indeed powerful, as any honest analysis of what is happening in education and the larger society clearly indicates. Second, they are quite talented in connecting to people who might ordinarily disagree with them. For this reason, I have shown in a number of places that people who find certain elements of conservative modernization relevant to their lives are not puppets. They are not dupes who have little understanding of the “real” relations of this society.

My position is very different. Following a Gramscian perspective, I want to answer the question of “*Why and how do people get convinced to accept the understandings and policies of dominant groups?*” As I argue in the books written in the 1990s and 2000s, and especially in *Educating the “Right” Way* (Apple 2006a), and in a number of the chapters represented in the book you are now reading, the reason why some of the arguments coming from the various factions of this new hegemonic bloc are listened to is because they *are* connected to aspects of the realities that people experience. The tense alliance of neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populist religious activists, and the professional and managerial new middle class works because there has been a very creative articulation of themes that resonate deeply with the experiences, fears, hopes, and dreams of people as they go about their daily lives. Worries about economic insecurity, the destruction of communities, feelings of powerlessness, lack of respect, bureaucratic inaction and intransigence—all of these are based in real things that very many people experience in their daily lives. The Right has often been more than a little manipulative in its articulation of these themes. It has integrated them within racist nativist discourses (indeed “race” and the “Other” as a source of bodily and cultural pollution play crucial roles in the conservative imaginary). And it has connected these themes to economically dominant forms of understanding, and to a problematic sense of “tradition.” But, this integration could only occur if they were organized around people’s understanding of their real material and cultural lives.

The second reason I have stressed the tension between good and bad sense and the ability of dominant groups to connect to people’s real understandings of their lives—aside from the continuation of the profound respect for Antonio Gramsci’s writings about this that was so visible even in my early work—has to do with my belief that we have witnessed a major educational accomplishment over the past three decades in many countries. The Right has successfully demonstrated that you need to work at the level of people’s daily experiences, not only in government policies. The accomplishment of such a vast educational project has many implications. It shows how important cultural struggles inside and outside of schools actually are. And, oddly enough, it gives reason for hope. It forces us to ask a significant question. *If the Right can do this, why can’t we?*

I do not mean this as a rhetorical question. As I have argued repeatedly in this next set of four books, the Right has shown how powerful the struggle over meaning and identity—and hence, schools, curricula, teaching, and evaluation—can be. While we should not want to emulate their often cynical and manipulative processes, the fact that they have had such success in pulling people under their ideological umbrella has much to teach us. Granted there are real differences in money and power between the

forces of conservative modernization and those whose lives are being tragically altered by the policies and practices coming from the alliance. But, the Right wasn’t as powerful 30 years ago as it is now. It collectively organized. It created a decentralized unity, one where each element sacrificed some of its particular agenda to push forward on those areas that bound them together. Can we not do the same?

I believe that we can, but only if we face up to the realities and dynamics of power in unromantic ways. And this means not only critically analyzing the rightist agendas and the effects of their increasingly mistaken and arrogant policies in education and so much else, but engaging in serious criticism of some elements within the progressive and critical educational communities as well. Thus, as I argued in *Educating the “Right” Way*, the “romantic possibilitarian” rhetoric of a good deal of the writing on critical pedagogy is not sufficiently based on a tactical or strategic analysis of the current situation, nor is it sufficiently grounded in its understanding of the reconstructions of discourse and movements that are occurring in all too many places. The sometimes mostly rhetorical material of critical pedagogy simply is unable to cope with what has happened. Only when it is linked much more to concrete issues of educational policy and practice—and to the daily lives of educators, students, and community members—can it succeed.

This, of course, is why journals such as *Rethinking Schools* and books such as *Democratic Schools* (Apple & Beane 1995, 2007) that connect critical educational theories and approaches to the actual ways in which they can be, and are, present in real classrooms become so important. Thus, while I may have been one of the originators of critical theory and critical pedagogy in the United States, I also have been one of its internal critics when it has forgotten what it is meant to do and has sometimes become simply an academic specialization at universities (see also Apple et al. 2009).

The story of how the book I mentioned above, *Democratic Schools* (Apple & Beane 1995, 2007), came about may be a good way of showing what I mean here. This book is a response to one of the tasks of the “critical scholar/activist” that I develop in more recent books such as *Global Crises, Social Justice, and Education* (Apple 2010b) and, in much greater detail, in my most recent book *Can Education Change Society?* (Apple 2013). Along with other people, I’ve argued that it is essential that critical educators do not ignore the question of practice. That is, we must find ways of speaking to (and learning from) people who now labor everyday in schools in worsening conditions which are made even worse by the merciless attacks from the Right. This means that rather than ignore “mainstream” organizations and publications, it’s important whenever possible to also occupy the spaces provided by existing “mainstream” publication outlets to publish books that provide *critical* answers to teachers’ questions about “What do I do on Monday?” during a conservative era. As I hinted at earlier, this space has too long been ignored by many theorists who are so interested in “purification” that they have not thought tactically enough, either about how one actually mobilizes people in education around issues of concern to practicing educators or about how much there is to learn from practicing educators about the possibilities and limits of educational actions within schools and communities.

This is where *Democratic Schools* enters as an important success. One very large “professional” organization in the United States—the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)—publishes books that are distributed each year to

its more than 150,000 members, most of whom are teachers or administrators in elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

At first I emphatically said “No”—not because I was against such a project, but because I believed quite strongly that the best people to do such a book would be those practicing critical teachers and administrators who were now engaged in doing what needed to be done “on Monday.” In essence, I felt that I should be their secretary, putting together a book based on their words, struggles, and accomplishments. If ASCD was willing for me to play the role of secretary, then I would do it. But I had one caveat. It had to be a truly honest book, one in which these critical educators could tell it as it really was.

After intense negotiations that guaranteed an absence of censorship, I asked Jim Beane to work with me on *Democratic Schools*. Both of us were committed to writing a book that provided clear practical examples of the power of Freirian and similar critically democratic approaches at work in classrooms and communities. *Democratic Schools* was not only distributed to most of the 150,000 members of the organization, but it has gone on to sell hundreds of thousands of additional copies in many nations. Thus, a very large number of copies of a book that tells the practical stories of the largely successful struggles of critically-oriented educators in real schools are now in the hands of educators who face similar problems daily. The publication and widespread distribution of *Democratic Schools*—and the publication and translation into multiple languages of the first and then the enlarged 2nd edition—provides one practical and strategic instance of making critical educational positions seem actually doable in “ordinary” institutions such as schools and local communities. Not unimportantly for me personally, it keeps me connected to the realities of curricula and teaching that sent me to TC in the first place.

While material from *Democratic Schools* is not included in this book, in order to more fully understand both sides of me—the critical analyst and theorist, and the person who still grounds himself in the daily struggles to build more critically democratic curricula and teaching—it would be useful for the reader to read that work as well. It complements the account of my activity as a film-maker with students and teachers found in *Official Knowledge*.

Learning from Others

My understanding of these political and educational issues, of the dangers we now face, and of what can and must be done to deal with them, is grounded not only in my early political experiences, in the gritty realities of working with children in urban and rural schools, in the research I’ve carried out on what schools do and do not do in this society, or in my and Jim’s work with practicing educators on building more critical and democratic curricula and teaching strategies. It also has been profoundly affected by the extensive international work in which I have been fortunate to engage in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. For example, beginning in the mid-1980s, I began to go to Brazil to work with the progressive Ministry of Education in the southern city of Porto Alegre and to give both academic and more popular lectures at universities and to teacher union groups. Most of my books had been translated there. Because of this, and because of similar theoretical and political tendencies in the work

coming out of Brazil and my own, I developed close relationships with many politically active educators there. This also meant that I developed not only an ongoing relationship with activist educators and researchers in the Workers Party throughout Brazil, but just as importantly, an even closer relationship with the great Brazilian critical educator Paulo Freire grew as well.

While I discuss this at greater length in *Can Education Change Society?*, oddly enough, unlike many critical educators in the United States, I actually had not been strongly influenced by Freire. While Freire’s arguments were indeed poetic and powerful, they had less of an impact on me. I had already been formed as a critical educator by the critical labor education and anti-racist traditions in the United States, traditions that had very similar understandings and practices as those so brilliantly articulated by Freire in his books. As we became friends over the years, our conversations were less those of teacher and taught—although I respected him immensely. They were more those of comrades who often agreed but sometimes disagreed. For example, I believed that Freire was much too romantic about the question of content. He seemed to easily assume that, almost automatically, oppressed people would discover what was crucial to know. I wanted much more attention to be paid to the *what* of the curriculum. It was only later that I realized that my ongoing public and private discussions with Freire had indeed had a lasting effect on me (Apple 2013, 1999).

These international connections were—and continue to be—crucial in the development of my work. Later on these were to be joined by intellectual and political connections in Japan, Korea, China, and elsewhere in Asia, in Spain, Portugal, Norway, and other nations in Europe, and especially in Latin America where my academic and political work in Brazil and then Argentina intensified. Thus, the international discussions, debates, and co-teaching, and the academic and political activity in which I engaged in these nations, have always had a powerful impact on me and have led me to develop what I hope are more nuanced understandings both of the ways in which context and history matter and of the multiple kinds and forms of dominance and politics that exist.

Thus, for example, I am now much better able to think through what roles different kinds of government/economy relations and histories (strong or weak, capitalist or state bureaucratic socialist, strong or weak labor movements) play. I also am now much more aware of how different traditions of religious impulses and movements, with their varying strengths and weaknesses, operate. Furthermore, the significance of histories of racial subjugation and gendered realities—and similar dynamics—are now clearer than they were before, something that provided an important part of my critical analyses of authoritarian populist religious movements in *Educating the “Right” Way*. Finally, I have come to have an immense amount of respect for the creative resiliency and political and educational courage of people in what we in the North somewhat arrogantly call the “Third World” (see, e.g., Apple 2010b; Apple & Buras 2006). Thus, words that we tend to treat as *nouns*—housing, food, education—I now, even more than earlier, very much recognize as *verbs*. They require constant effort, constant struggle and constant organized and personal action (Davis 2006). What this kind of understanding means for education and what we can learn from the ongoing struggles by oppressed groups and critical educators in many nations is, again, further developed in *Global Crises, Social Justice, and Education* (Apple 2010b) and *Can Education*

Change Society? (Apple 2013), both of which focus not on rightist policies and the formation of common-sense but on *progressive* possibilities and movements.

Thus, these ongoing and deepening international relations and experiences provide some of the reasons why in these and other more recent books I have argued the North needs to be taught by the South (see Apple 2010b), with the development of the Citizen School and participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, for example, being more than a little significant in this regard (Apple et al. 2003; Apple 2013). Similar things could be said about my involvement with the struggles of the once banned but now legal teachers union in Korea. I have been rather hesitant to tell the story of these personal activities, since I clearly am not alone in taking such risks and in engaging in serious political work inside and outside the United States. But in *Can Education Change Society?*, I use the story of my participation in these struggles and of my arrest in South Korea as a way of showing both the dangers and especially the progressive educational possibilities of such actions in identifiable emancipatory social movements.

Further Personal Reflections

In the previous section of this introductory chapter, I tried to be honest about a number of the complex issues that I've attempted to understand and about how much I have learned from others internationally. Of course, no person, and certainly not me, can ever be fully aware of what drives her or his intellectual and political efforts. What I do know is that it is more than a little important for me to remember how my work was formed out of the time I spent teaching in one of the poorest communities in the United States and then in a very conservative rural area. I think that this has acted as a reality check, as did my role as a president of a teachers union.

But this is not all. The fact that I had grown up poor, but in a strongly politically active family, was significant, as was my activity while still a teenager in anti-racist mobilizations. That I am the father of a black child (see Apple 2000) is also crucial here, since the immense significance of the processes of racialization and minoritization and the ongoing struggles against this have been all too visible. Being married to Rima D. Apple, the noted historian of medicine and of women's health, for over four decades has also meant that I have been constantly taught about the lives of and politics surrounding women (see, e.g., Apple, R. D. 1987, 2006).

Added to this were the years I spent working as a printer before, and then during, the time I went to night school for my initial college degree. Coming from a family of *printers*—that most radical bastion of working-class struggles over literacy and culture—meant something. It demanded that literacy and the struggles over it were connected to differential power. Theory and research in education, hence, were supposed to *do something* about the conditions I and many other people had experienced. Because of this, this has also meant for me that—even with the attention my critical work has generated—I have never felt totally comfortable within the academy or with an academic life. Indeed, if I lose the discomfort, I fear I will lose myself.

What does this mean to those people who still want to affix an easy label to me and my work? To be honest, I am not one who responds well to labels. As I noted, I am not in a church, so I am not worried about heresy. I am not simply a “neo-Marxist,” a “sociologist,” a “critical curriculum scholar,” or someone in “critical theory” or “critical

pedagogy.” Nor am I someone whose roots can be traced simply to something like “phenomenology meets Marxism,” although there is some truth to that in much of my earlier efforts. As I showed in the list of my early influences, a commitment to the arts—written, visual, and tactile—and to an embodied and culturally/politically critical aesthetic, have formed me in important ways as well. It may be useful to know in this regard that the “W” in Michael W. Apple stands for Whitman—the poet of the visceral and the popular, Walt Whitman, who like me came from New Jersey. Furthermore, as a film-maker who works with teachers and children to create aesthetically and politically powerful visual forms, this kind of activity provides me with a sense of the importance of the very act of creation, of knowledge being something people can *make*, not simply “learn” (see Apple 2000).

When I look back over the most recent books I've written at this stage of my career, it now seems that I am still dealing with the same questions about the relationship between culture and power, about the relationship among the economic, political, and cultural spheres, and about what all this means for educational work, with which I started more than four decades ago.⁶ And I am still trying to answer a question that was put so clearly by George Counts (1932) when he asked “Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?” Counts was a person of his time and the ways he both asked and answered this question were a bit naïve. (Counts, of course, was not alone in asking this question. Indeed, as I demonstrate in much more detail in *Can Education Change Society?*, it was asked and answered in quite eloquent ways by many educators and public intellectuals within oppressed communities, both before and during the period in which Counts wrote his famous book.) But the tradition of radically interrogating schools, of asking who benefits from their dominant forms of curricula, teaching, and evaluation, of arguing about what they might do differently, and of asking searching questions of what would have to change in order for this to happen—all of this is what has worked through me and so many others throughout the history of the curriculum field and education in general.

I stand on the shoulders of many others who have taken such issues seriously and hope to have contributed both to the recovery of the collective memory of this tradition and to pushing it further along conceptually, historically, empirically, and practically. If we think of democracy as a vast river, it increasingly seems to me that our task is to keep the river flowing, to remove the blockages that impede it, and to participate in expanding the river to be more inclusive so that it flows for everyone.

On This Collection

The chapters in this book are largely from the books I have mentioned throughout this introductory essay, although a few are from elsewhere. They range from early work that was included in *Ideology and Curriculum* and *Education and Power*. They also include a selection of some of my more recent analyses on the ways we might understand rightist ideological transformations and why they have been successful. The book ends with a recent article on globalization, teacher education, and of the tasks of the public intellectual—what I call *the critical scholar/activist*. The latter issue, the role of the organic public intellectual and the history of how this role has been struggled with by such figures as Paulo Freire, George S. Counts, W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and others, is more fully developed in *Can Education Change Society?* (Apple 2013).

The chapters deal with many of the issues to which I have pointed in this introductory chapter. Among these are: the development of critical theories of knowledge and power; the necessity to move beyond reductive and essentializing approaches and to include a wider set of dynamics in order to better understand the intersections of and contradictions among class, gender, and race; the politics of language and the process of labeling; the content and form of the curriculum; the processes of deskilling and intensification in teachers' work; the power of and contradictions within agency; the struggles over texts and official knowledge; the importance of the state and of politics in general; how rightist movements get formed and how they work; the conflicts over issues of "common culture" and a common curriculum; the power of conservative religious movements in education and the larger society; new forms of schooling such as homeschooling and their ideological and social bases; the effects of globalization and diasporic populations on our understanding of the politics of culture and the education of teachers; and finally, the responsibilities of being a critical scholar and activist educator.

Because a number of the individual selections in this book were published as chapters in books taken from various periods of my writing, there may be occasional references in them to parts of the book from which they were taken. Thus, phrases such as "As I argued in Chapter x..." or "As I show in Chapter y..." may occasionally appear. In some of the material included in *Knowledge, Power, and Education*, there also may be references to articles in journals and chapters in edited books that I have written that are not in this book. Rather than rewrite the material published in this book, I have chosen to maintain both the content and the style found in its original.

The material included in this collection represents only a portion of my efforts to understand the various currents in that river of democracy, the attempts by dominant groups to channel it in dangerous directions and to block its flow, and the various ways in which counter-hegemonic movements can and do offer serious challenges to dominance. I would ask the reader to remember that this is indeed a *selection*. Because of this, by its very nature, this means that many arguments are noted but may be more fully developed elsewhere in articles, chapters, and other books that, for reasons of space, could not be represented here. The act of selecting from a much larger body of work is not easy. Indeed, it becomes an example of—drawing on Raymond Williams—what I have called the "selective tradition" in establishing the corpus of legitimate knowledge (see Williams 1961; Apple 1979/1990/2004).

In books such as this, breadth must balance depth. What counts as "core" and what counts as "periphery" requires sometimes painful choices. However, I trust that what is included in this book is sufficient to give a clear sense of the kinds of issues with which I have dealt and why I and others believe that issues such as these deserve critical reflection and critical action if we are to continue the crucial struggle to create and defend an education worthy of its name.

Notes

1. If you have ever seen the popular film *Lean On Me*, the much romanticized account of how a principal supposedly changed a "failing" inner city school, this was based on Eastside High School in Paterson, New Jersey. This is the high school I attended and one of the schools in Paterson at which I taught. It may also be of some interest that during the Red Scare days in

the 1950s, many of my family's radical books and journals were wrapped in plastic and buried under a chicken coop at my grandfather's small farm. The books were dug up during the time I was at Columbia and given to me as a gift, signifying that I was carrying on the family tradition.

2. I was what has been called a "red diaper baby," the child of a communist mother and a socialist father. Needless to say, family discussions about politics were always "interesting."
3. For more on my relationship with Huebner, see Apple (2010a).
4. Many of my books have gone through multiple editions, with revisions to the original arguments and the inclusion of what is often a good deal of additional material. I've employed the "f" symbol to indicate the varying dates of each edition, but the reader should understand that each edition may have very significant changes. When a new and expanded edition has been published by a different publisher, I have listed it separately. In addition, I have edited a large number of books in multiple languages that have also been important to the development of my arguments. But in the interests of space, I haven't listed all of them here.
5. I need to acknowledge the strong influence of my wife, Rima D. Apple, here. Rima is an historian of medicine and of women's health. I owe her a good deal in terms of my understanding of the issues surrounding women's lives and of the complexities of women's agency and struggles.
6. For discussions of some of the best recent work on these issues from multiple critical traditions, see Apple et al. (2009) and Apple et al. (2010).

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