

Educational and Curricular Restructuring and the Neo-liberal and Neo-conservative Agendas: Interview with Michael Apple

Michael W. Apple

**University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, USA**

Abstract

In this interview Michael Apple's theoretical standpoint is made clear: he analyses educational and curricular restructuring in the context of the neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies and discusses educational contemporary themes covering a broad range of issues. Themes related to the fields of sociology of education, critical theory, and curriculum are discussed not only in the context of the educational policies of the US but also in the global context. Among the issues addressed by Apple are the advances of the New Right and the forms by which the conservative movements have been articulating themselves politically to impose their views about textbooks, national curriculum, and teacher education. The interview also deals with aspects of multiculturalism and the dynamics of race, class, and gender, working towards an understanding of the movements of struggle and resistance conducted by teachers and other social actors in opposition to neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas.

Resumo

Nesta entrevista são debatidos, de uma forma bastante ampla, temas contemporâneos da educação que explicitam as posições teóricas de Michael Apple a respeito da reestruturação educativa e curricular no contexto das políticas neoliberais e neoconservadoras. São discutidos temas relativos ao campo da sociologia da educação, da teoria crítica e do currículo, relacionados não somente com as políticas educativas nos Estados Unidos, mas também com o contexto global. As questões aqui abordadas versam sobre os avanços da Nova Direita e as formas como os movimentos conservadores se têm vindo a articular politicamente para impor suas visões sobre os manuais, o currículo nacional e a certificação docente, entre outros temas importantes. A entrevista debate, ainda, aspectos relacionados com o multiculturalismo e as dinâmicas de raça, classe e gênero, buscando uma compreensão dos movimentos de luta e resistência que são desenvolvidos por docentes e demais actores sociais como oposição à agenda neoliberal e neoconservadora.

Interviewers: *Dr. Apple, as we approach the year 2000, what do you see as the main issues in terms of educational policy?*

Apple: There are a number of issues that I think are crucial. In my mind, the most important is what I have called in my most recent books (such as Cultural Politics and Education and Educating the “Right” Way) the conservative restoration or “conservative modernization.” That is, the movement more and more to redefine what education is for and how we are to proceed in education both as a practice and as a set of policies. There is a new alliance that is exerting leadership in educational policy and educational reform. In many nations there has been a shift from a social democratic accord or alliance to a coalition centered around 3 or 4 groups that are pushing education and social policy in general in conservative directions. This new alliance or “new hegemonic bloc” is a relatively broad umbrella; it is also tense and filled with contradictory tendencies. But taken together it has been very effective. Let me just mention something about each of the groups who are under the umbrella.

First, there are neo-liberals. These are economic modernizers who want educational policy to be centered around the economy, around performance objectives based on a closer connection between schooling and paid work. I want to stress the word “paid” here, because these people have a very patriarchal vision of the labor force. They tend not to think about who does the unpaid labor in this society – largely women. The economic modernizers are in leadership, by and large, in this new bloc. They see schools as connected to a marketplace, especially the global capitalist market, and the labor needs and processes of such a market. They also often see schools themselves as in need of being transformed and made more competitive by placing them into marketplaces through voucher plans, tax credits, and other similar marketizing strategies. Because neo-liberals are in leadership in this alliance, using the umbrella metaphor, we might say that they are holding the handle of the umbrella.

A second group are neo-conservatives. In most cases it is important to make a distinction between the neo-liberal economic modernizers and neo-conservatives, although in some nations they do overlap. Neo-conservatives often agree with the neo-liberal emphasis on the economy, but their main agenda is cultural “restoration.” Examples in the United States are people such as E.D. Hirsch, former Secretary of Education William Bennett, and the late Alan Bloom. These are people who want a return to a totally romanticized version of schooling in which we have a standard curriculum based on that eloquent fiction, the Western tradition. They wish a return to teacher dominated, high status knowledge, largely based on the traditions that have historically been seen as the most legitimate knowledge at elite universities. I mentioned that this is a romantic tradition, since, by and large, there was never a time (at least certainly in the schools in the United States) where everyone learned the same curriculum, where all people spoke the same language, and where everyone agreed either on the Western tradition as the dominant model or on what should be included and excluded in that tradition. Thus, its position is based on a thoroughly romanticized version of the past, and either a romanticized vision of past

students and teachers or a vision of them that assumes that without external control they will destroy “real” culture.

Because of this, neo-conservatives are deeply committed to establishing tighter mechanisms of control over knowledge, morals, and values through national or state curricula and national or state mandated (and very reductive) testing. This is based on a very strong mistrust of teachers and local school administrators. They believe that only through establishing strong central control will the content and values of “legitimate knowledge” take its rightful place in the curriculum. Along with this is also a commitment to a supposedly more rigorous curriculum, one based on what they believe are “higher standards.” Thus, schooling itself must be more competitive, with students being re-stratified based on what are seen as “neutral” knowledge and “neutral” achievement tests. In essence, this has proven to be a return to Social Darwinist principles in education. It has also created a situation in which the “tail of the test wags the dog of the teacher.”

There is a third group that is increasingly powerful in the United States. Following Stuart Hall, we can name them authoritarian populists. These are often Christian fundamentalists who want a return to what they believe is the Biblical tradition as the basis of knowledge, sacred texts and sacred authority. This part of the alliance is often very mistrustful of multiculturalism in the curriculum. By and large, they too want a return to a pedagogy that is based on traditional relations of authority in which the teacher and adults are always in control. But they get their warrant from inerrantist readings of the Bible.

Authoritarian populist religious conservatives are extremely worried about the relationship between schools and the body and about sexuality. They are worried about the relationship between schooling and what they perceive is the traditional family. For them, the traditional family is God-given, as are relations of gender and age. God has put men in dominant positions of authority and has decreed that religious authority must supercede public policy. In the United States this has led to what have been called "stealth campaigns" in which socially and religiously conservative people hide their religious beliefs and run for election to local school boards or state school boards on a platform of fiscal responsibility. Once in power, they attempt to purge the curriculum both of any elements of socially “liberal” positions and of any elements that are not biblically based. Their mobilizations have been effective, so effective in fact that many state curricula have become even more conservative than before and many teachers have become “self-censors” to avoid conflict over the curriculum.

The fourth group that has been influential in setting the agenda in educational policy does not necessarily agree with all of the positions advanced by the previous three elements of the new hegemonic bloc. It does not see itself as having an ideological agenda. This group is made up of members of the professional and managerial new middle class. If I may be permitted to speak perhaps too broadly, these people are, in essence, experts for hire.

They are often employed by the state because of their technical expertise in evaluation and testing, efficiency, management, cost-benefit analysis, and similar technical and

procedural skills. These skills and knowledge are their cultural capital and have enabled them to carve out spheres of authority within the state. Their agenda is one of managerialism, and it is often their needs that are represented in the state's imposition of policies of "steering at a distance" through national and state testing and tighter control, through the use of industrial models, through cost/benefit analysis, etc. Their cultural capital is what I called "technical administrative knowledge" in Education and Power. It enables the most powerful groups within the conservative modernization, neo-liberals and neo-conservatives, to tighten up the ship, to make us more accountable, etc.

Thus, each of these groups has an agenda. But leadership over the main issues is exercised by the neo-liberals or economic modernizers. They, of course, have to compromise with the other groups so that the alliance includes issues of importance to neo-conservatives, authoritarian populists, and the upwardly mobile professional and managerial new middle class. But, in general, the agenda is set by these who want closer connections between schools and the economy.

This is a partial view, however. There's another side about which I'll be somewhat briefer. This involves those issues surrounding a vision and a practice of democracy that is thicker than the "thin" vision of democracy as consumption practices advanced by neo-liberals.

These issues involve the power of (collective) local decision-making, of a curriculum that comes from below, rather than from above and that responds more and more to the needs, histories, and cultures of oppressed people, of people of color, and of poor people, and a more socially responsive pedagogy. In the United States, while this is less well-known than, say, voucher plans and plans for "high-stakes" testing, these issues are actually becoming increasingly powerful. Thus, one of my recent books, Democratic Schools, portrays in detail a number of schools that are organized around this more democratic agenda. It tells their stories, as a way of interrupting the Right and showing in practice that it is possible to engage in socially and educationally critical activities that solve real problems in real schools in real communities. One of the reasons that conservative policies dominate is because teachers and others are not given realistic alternatives that actually work. Democratic Schools is a conscious attempt by a group of socially and educationally critical educators to answer the question "What do I do on Monday morning?"¹ is socially just ways.

Thus, there's at least two sets of agendas, one based on the internal compromises within the forces of conservative modernization largely guided by neo-liberal assumptions and one organized around the compromises within multiple progressive communities of educators, activists, and others. These continue to lock horns, so to speak. To be honest, right now I am not totally optimistic that the more democratic agenda will get the public notice and will become as visible as the more conservative agenda. However, the fact that Democratic Schools has sold hundreds of thousands copies and has been translated into many languages does give some reason for optimism.

Interviewers: *Could you comment on the trend toward "multicultural education"?*

Apple: This is complicated because I do not want to say disparaging things about people who are working so hard, especially since many of them are my friends and allies. First, we have to again understand that the way hegemonic alliances are formed and maintained by powerful groups, and the ways agendas are set and maintained, is through compromise. Further, if we want to understand why things change in American schools, by and large it is not because of intended or internal reforms. Rather, it has been and is pressure from large-scale social movements that generate the conditions through which schools are transformed. One of the major transformative movements in the last century in the United States is the African American movement towards liberation. It pressed schools to change their pedagogy, their curriculum, and their organization. Parts of that movement often had quite a radical agenda.

Now, in order for dominant groups to maintain leadership, they must incorporate some limited segments of that agenda into their own position. And what dominant groups did do, quite remarkably, and very successfully in some ways, was to take (how can I put this?) Both the most moderate and safest forms--and often the most conservative forms--of multiculturalism and put them into schools and curriculum. Therefore, we now have in textbooks, for instance, what I call "mentioning," where you have page after page that "mention" the contributions of African American, that mention the contribution of Latinos and Latinas group or Asians, or of women. These are most often put in as special sections in the textbooks and, hence, have the status "add-ons" about the culture and history of "the other." Thus, their status as other than "real Americans" is guaranteed. In the process, students never see the world through the eyes of oppressed people. They don't see the world through the eyes of the identifiable people who are on the bottom, so to speak, socially.

So, multiculturalism was a partial gain, because large social movements forced dominant groups to respond. We must always remember that. Multiculturalism was not a gift. It took decades of struggle over a white-dominated power structure. And, yet, at the same time, a good deal of multiculturalism as it has been instituted into schools is of the "safest" kind, one that does not interrupt the power of whiteness as "the human ordinary." This is one of the ways in which existing power relations recuperate oppositional movements back within dominance.

Some of these points are being constantly raised by groups of people (African American activists, Native Americans, those of Asian descent, gays and lesbians, members of the disability rights community, and many other groups) who feel that their cultures and histories are not being represented in the curriculum. Because of this, I think that multiculturalism is quite contradictory. I want to applaud it for its gains. Yet, I am worried that with the conservative restoration, many of the more socially progressive gains are being washed away as we move more and more towards a curriculum that is "safer" and has very few elements of social activism in it. I would prefer that we have not just

multicultural education, but specifically anti-racist education. This is an education that realizes that this nation was built around racial exploitation and that it still has a racial power structure. Thus, the stories of oppressed people of color then and now would not be simply an "add on." They would constitute an integral part of the way this nation was formed. This would require a recognition that the story of the United States (and I think many other nations) is also the story of racial oppression. Without that part of the story, there is no story. It would also require that we see the world through the eyes of people of color, not just mention their contributions as an "add on".

Interviewers: *What is your opinion of other sociologists of education i.e. Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu?*

Apple: I find the work of both of them to be extremely important. As you may know, I have critically examined the work of both of them in print², since I believe that the way to show how much you respect someone's work is to take it seriously enough to subject it to critical analysis. But I will be the first to admit that I stand on their shoulders. Basil Bernstein happens to be a friend of mine and he's someone who has taught me a great deal. While I know Pierre Bourdieu, I know him less well.

I want to separate them, but only after I say something about the commonalities they have. Both of them have very unromantic appraisals of the nature of power relations. Both of them have not been so totally taken in by some of the more aggressive forms of postmodernism which have forgotten that this is capitalism and that this fact makes a major difference. Nor have they forgotten that structures do exist. For both Bernstein and Bourdieu, the world is not simply a text; these structures are not simply discursive constructions. Further, both of them have a fairly unromantic appraisal of class relations. In my mind, this is crucial, especially in a time when we are moving in the United States and in many other nations away from an analysis of class and away from structural analyses. I do not want to defend reductive structural analysis, but in this period of time when all too many people seem to have lost the collective memory of the gains made by the traditions of structural analysis, there are important positive moments in keeping alive this set of traditions.

Of course, class is very complicated both empirically and conceptually, to say nothing of historically. It does not exist alone. People are classed and gendered and raced all at the same time. Thus, you can't just talk about class as if it sat isolated from other crucial dynamics of power. Neither can you assume that everything is explained by an economy. That would be horribly reductive and essentializing.

On the other hand, it is truly naive to assume that class relations have somehow gone away, or that it makes no difference that there is an economy like the one we have. Such a position is utterly romantic. (Of course, what Bernstein and Bourdieu mean by class is not necessarily what, say, the neo-marxists mean by class and its dynamics.) Saying this, however, it is clear that both of them share a particular agenda that wants to ask the

question of "What is the relationship between culture, power, and economy in education and the larger society?" I find this a profoundly important question. And, again, each of them has taught me a good deal about how one might ask and answer this kind of question with recognition of its complexity.

Now, let me say a few words on their differences. Bernstein, I think, is much more related to the realities of schools, curricula, and teaching. For that reason he has probably been somewhat more influential on the way I look at specific curricular and pedagogical relations. While his general agenda is similar to Bourdieu's, it is more deeply connected to the kinds of things those of us in education are about. Bourdieu, I think has a somewhat broader project. Yet, his work on various forms of capital--cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, economic capital, and so on--and the conversion strategies that cohere with them, is exceptional and has been a clear influence on a generation of critical research. I include myself in that group of researchers since his work provides a way of thinking about the role of education in the reproduction and transformation (Bourdieu is less good on this latter dynamic) of various forms of capital and how education and these conversion strategies are situated within social fields of power. Even with my criticisms of parts of Bourdieu, I find this approach very productive.

Let me briefly mention some of my criticisms of them. Again, they're both quite brilliant. However, as I've said in print, I think that Bernstein is a rather too structuralist. In his work, you don't see real people act, nor do you see real social movements in formation and acting, nor finally do you see the processes and results of social transformation. I think that these are crucial for our understanding of education. We need to focus on transformations and social movements--not only on structural forms and positions in society but on the transformative effects of these social movements. Thus, I would go considerably further than he does, as I did in my own analysis of rightist social movements and their history and effects in both Official Knowledge and Cultural Politics and Education.

Like Bernstein, Bourdieu is complex and at times rather unclear. However, again, we need to be patient as we read him. Yet, one of the points I have made over the years is that the reader is not the only one who should be doing all of the work. I think that it is very important that we struggle (and at times it is a struggle) to be as clear as our subject matter allows. Let me give a personal example. In both the original 1993 edition of Official Knowledge and the new second edition published in 2000, I did not send the volume to the publisher until I was satisfied that I had written it in as clear a manner as was possible. In the case of the 1993 version, this involved holding it out of publication for more than an extra year. This was not simply a concern with style. It was about the politics of representation. Given the fact that the Right is so powerful today, it is important that progressive texts not require that you read seven other books in order to understand them. Theory is absolutely crucial. But I am worried about over-theorization. At times, Bourdieu suffers from this, although as I mentioned there are times when one's subject requires a high degree of abstraction. Yet, it is exactly here where the struggle to be as clear as

possible is even more important.

I have other worries about parts of Bourdieu's corpus as well: about his assumption that French culture is the culture of the world; about his multiplication of forms of capital that at times seem endless; about how far we can take market analogies as analytic tools; about his tendency on occasion to over-generalize; and about whether one can do such work without being more deeply involved in concrete political/cultural movements. (This last criticism seems less powerful to me given the translation into English of his more political writings recently.) But on the whole, I really do want to applaud the work of both Bourdieu and Bernstein.

Interviewers: *Why has "critical theory" been more readily accepted in England and Australia than in the United States?*

Apple: In order to respond to this, I have to ask a prior question. "What do we mean by critical theory?" Critical theory in its formal sense has a very long history as a very specific kind of analytic and political approach largely in Germany and France, especially in Germany during and after Weimar and then either purged or forced to flee under the Nazi regime. Of course, names such as Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and others are associated with this tradition. This form of critical theory was an attempt to think through the relationship between culture, forms of domination, and society. It began as a cultural/political analysis of capitalist mass culture and then stretched beyond capitalism and its social forms—thus its analysis, for instance, of technical knowledge and cognitive interests as forms of domination such as that done by Habermas in his discussions of "system," life-world, communication, and legitimation.

This is a very specific history. I assume by the question that when we say "critical theory" we actually mean what I prefer to call "critical educational studies" which is a much broader category. It includes Marxist and neo-Marxist work and also includes work that is more related to the Frankfurt school I spoke about just a minute ago. But it also includes multiple kinds of feminist analyses, critical cultural studies, and many other critical approaches. Because of this, I'm going to define it as that broader set of approaches. The answer to the question of why it has been found less in the US than perhaps elsewhere is very complicated and is related to historically important question of "Why are there not large scale socialist movements in the US?" Much as well depends on the specifically a-theoretical, positivist, and pragmatic leanings historically in the academy here. Some of it is the result of the fact that there were indigenous traditions within the United States that raised similar questions, but have not been recognized as part of critical theory. And part of it has to do with the ways in which the left has been marginalized and at times fired from universities during periods of crisis.

Interviewers: *Has "critical theory" been so conceptually tied to socialism as to preclude general acceptance?*

Apple: Let me merge these two questions together then. First of all, as I just said, I think that it is the case that it has been less readily accepted in the United States than elsewhere in part because the socialist tradition in the United States has been truncated. We are the only nation of its type in the world that has never even had a large and serious labor party. Further, one of the things we forget is that the boats that were filled with immigrants coming over were often nearly just as filled with immigrants going back. Some people who did not "make it" here—at times even very political people—often went back.

Added to this is the fact that with the vast openness of the West—after the forced enclosure of Native Americans—people who were not making it in industrial America in the mills or in urban areas among immigrants and workers (which were often hotbeds of activism of the type we normally associate with socialism and Marxism) could leave. So, we had a "safety valve" in the United States that was often not available in Europe and other nations. Further, the tradition here has been to critically use liberalism with its focus on individual rights, what I call "person rights," in opposition to property rights. This has meant that liberalism has had a more important history here than socialism.

We need to remember that the genesis of a social and political discourse does not always pre-ordain how it will be used socially and politically. Thus, I want to point out that liberalism has been used for quite radical purposes in the United States. It is not simply that it has been a tool of domination. Even with its specific vision of the individual, one which tended to de-emphasize people's collective membership, it was radicalized by men and women and used for their own purposes. In order to get person rights for you and your family, you had to join unions and you had to struggle. For women, being treated as fully functioning citizens was crucial both in the paid workplace and in the home, as well as in the state. Therefore, liberalism was reappropriated by women as a tool in their struggles over bodily control and over economic and political rights. Liberalism did and does have its contradictions, but it became a more flexible political tool than we might expect. Thus, for a variety of reasons—the geographical openness, the existence of less sympathy to more collective kinds of organizations (all too often being based on a racist nativism in which socialism was seen as an "alien" ideology), people going back as well as staying here, and very, very importantly the repressive nature of anti-union and anti-labor acts that industrialists and the government engaged in here—all of these things and more had effects.

Take education, for instance. In many communities, if you were a socialist teacher you were fired. If you were a teacher of elementary or secondary schools and you wrote a letter to the newspaper avowing even moderately socialist ideals, you could lose your job. There were very few universities or school systems in the United States, as another example, that did not have a history of similar tragedies or of other ways of purging people who were overtly critical of prevailing economic and political policies, especially of finding ways that those on the left felt the full brunt of federal, state, and local pressure.

Perhaps comparing this very complicated history in the United States to other nations with their own historical complexities would be helpful. Take Australia and England. Each has a much more overt history of nationally powerful labor union struggles. What this has meant was brought home to me during a period when I worked with teachers unions and with socially critical educators in Australia. I am a former president of a teacher's union in New Jersey and that union prided itself on its history of taking serious actions. Yet, when I went to Australia for the first time, the unions there did things that seemed unthinkable in the United States.

The kindergarten teachers union there went on strike and shut down the schools because \$300 was cut from the teachers' budget to buy reading materials for their classrooms. Such action is part of long tradition there. It would almost never happen in the United States, in part because for decades strikes by public employees like teachers were (and in some areas still are) illegal. The leaders of teachers unions in the United States that went on strike were jailed. Hence, there is a very different set of circumstances, one which acts as both cause and effect, that accounts for the fact that in, say, England and Australia or other nations they have a longer history of Marxist and neo-Marxist analysis.

Let me add one other thing. Not only does the US have a long history of radical populism, one with less of a theoretical background, that comes from the history of farm/labor movement; but Marx was not available in the United States. There were no United States's editions of his work. In essence, you could not buy him or read him, except with great difficulty. Now, a number of the parts of some Marxist traditions were sometimes reductive or even wrong; but without the easy availability of a good deal of the material, it is difficult to develop a rich and nuanced critical tradition based on these positions. And when such a tradition does in fact ultimately develop it will be reductive and often quite rhetorical since it will have been cut off from the intense debates and controversies that may have characterized the international discussions. It will then be easy to dismiss and stereotype.

Interviewers: *Is American culture resistant to seeking the underlying political meanings of education and curriculum?*

Apple: Each of these questions is quite complicated. I'm aware that I do not have a whole issue of the journal to answer them so sometimes I must simply give an outline of an answer.

There are dynamics in the history in the United States that make American culture resistant to seeking political meanings. Let me explain this. I hinted earlier that there is a history in the United States that has positive and negative moments surrounding what might be called anti-theory and anti-intellectualism. Now, in some ways, that is a very progressive moment.

Historically, the tradition of aristocratic culture is under-developed in the United States. Thus, one of the positive moments of American culture is its populist form. In

general, there is a real dislike of a elitism. This means that theoretically complex apparatuses involved in critically analyzing the politics of education and the curriculum, ones that require a great deal of discipline and study, actually are seen as simply “mere theory.” These traditions are tarred with the theory brush. This is connected to a nascent, but sometimes quite overt, anti-theory tradition, which as I've mentioned is partly contradictory. It has some quite positive moments because of the American experience with pragmatism. It rests on an unstated but still powerful demand that says “I want these things to be able to be used in my daily life.” In many ways, I respond very positively to that since it does intuitively understand that all too much social theory is imposed and the voices and needs of ordinary people are muted within it.

However, there's a negative moment to this position as well. It requires even harder work to examine things politically here because the kinds of political and theoretical resources that are available “naturally” in the universities or in the press and the media in, say, Europe have much less of a lengthy history here, because, again, they were either actively purged or were harder to find.

There's one last thing I want to say about this question. I actually don't think that it is the case that American culture is necessarily resistant to understanding political meanings. It may be that what we count as politics is also somewhat different or even perhaps wider. An example would be something like this. Many people in the United States historically have argued, often quite powerfully, against the ways schools operate and the curriculum and pedagogy that dominate them. These critiques have been couched largely in the language of individual rights. That is just as political and does have its own tradition here in schools. But the dominance of individualism as a discourse and as a set of structural conditions in the United States has made it hard for these criticisms to be turned into politically collective questions. However, you can't understand, for instance, the history of women or the history of people of color or the history of working class and ethnic struggle in the United States without saying that for the vast majority of people of color and for many women and working class people in the United States, the meanings of education and the curriculum have constantly been criticized. It is often only the dominant culture that does not recognize the political nature of the curriculum in American education. Further, the meaning of individualism is extremely complex and contradictory in the United States. It is not simply about selfishness and it is not only about market relations. Often it has become deeply politicized and has been used by oppressed people as a resource against dominant meanings and relations inside and outside of education. But it can also be used ideologically by these very same dominant groups to undercut progressive movements.

Interviewers: *What current political and sociological issues are now affecting education?*

Apple: I've partly answered that in my first response, but let me go further here. As I noted,

right now there are major transformations going on. As an example, we are changing education into a commodity to be purchased. The very meaning of democracy now is consumption practices. What was once a political concept and practice, one based on collective dialogue and negotiation, is now a wholly economic concept. Under the influence of neo-liberalism now, the very meaning of citizenship is being radically transformed. The citizen is now simply the consumer in all too many countries. The world is seen as a vast supermarket. Schools, and even our students as in the case of Channel One in the United States where children are sold as a captive audience for commercial advertisers who market their products in schools, become commodities that are bought and sold in the same way everything else is bought and sold.

This is a major transformation in the way we think of ourselves. Thinking about citizenship as a political concept meant that to be a citizen you participated in building and restructuring your institutions. To be a consumer is to be a possessive individual who is known by her or his products. You are defined by what you buy, not by what you do. Thus, the general sociological and economic movement that redefines democracy and citizenship into being a set of consumption practices, and in which the world is seen as a vast supermarket, is having a major effect on education.

There is another movement, or rather, movements that I think are having a major effect as well. These movements are what some postmodern and poststructural theories are trying to represent. These movements are aimed toward a more diverse (and perhaps more fragmented) politics, that is, political movements that are no longer centered only around labor, unions, and our traditional assumptions about who the “real” historical actors are. While some of these movements are in my mind too fragmenting, a number of them have important elements of good sense, since they do not assume that a simple additive model is sufficient. Thus, they do not assume that adding race and then simply adding gender is enough. They look for issues that integrate movements together. Thus, for them we are no longer centered around only race lines; we are no longer centered around only class lines; or we are not only centered around lines of sex/gender.

This partly responds to the fragmentation of social movements. There are alliances being built across class, race, and gender/sex lines. What I call de-centered unities are being built. There are alliances across borders between Mexican women workers in the new (and exploitative) factories being built south of the US border and US largely male unions who want to fight against the lowering of wages on both sides of the border. There are black lesbian social movements; there are gay Hispanic and Latino social movements; there are movements based upon environmental destruction that combine race and class in complex ways. Therefore, there are large scale collective movements, ones that most of us would associate with needed progressive transformation in society and education, but which our accepted theories may not recognize as major actors. This sense of fragmentation of “the” emancipatory project is unsettling for many critical educators. What were once certain as the defining issues (class, the economy, the state) have been added to. This creates both possibilities and dilemmas. For instance, issues of sexuality and the body, disability, postcolonialism, and many more have been placed at the center of many people’s actions.

This is all too the good. However, these relations have not simply been added to the agendas of progressives, they have sometimes been taken up as substitutes for other struggles over the economy, over exploitation, over racial degradation that many people have given their entire lives to. Because of this, the formation of a progressive politics across differences has been hard to build. This situation has created a real crisis because the right is relatively coherent and the politics of the left now are extremely fragmented.

In a number of recent books, I've argued that I am not in a church so I am not worried about heresy. But, I do have some reservations about some aspects of both postmodern politics and post theories, especially when they lead us, as I said earlier, to ignore class and political economy and treat the world as a text. These forms of "romantic possibilitarianism" are worrisome to me. My own position is that I would hope for what I called a decentered unity—groups and movements that work together on a number of broad fronts. This has some similarity to past "popular front" politics that enabled people to join together rather than fighting against each other. But I would broaden the range of politics and issues that are seen as important. The key is to focus on those areas of contention that have the possibility of creating alliances among various movements and across various institutions such as the economy, education, cultural struggles, health care, and so on, at the same time as the individual struggles over the specific issues of each group are not marginalized.

The politics of the body around AIDS, for example, combines international economic struggles, the dominance of profit in the pharmaceutical and medical industries, the exploitation of Third World peoples, neo-liberal policies, masculinities and cultural struggles for women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, the control of the media and of the politics of representation, education in sexuality and its suppression by conservative movements, to name but some of the issues and movements that must be jointly involved if progress is to be made. HIV/AIDS is not a "minor" issue. It is having a truly devastating effect on entire continents and is one of the areas in which class, race, gender, sexuality, anti-imperialism, colonial and postcolonial realities, and religion intersect. Economic, political, cultural, and educational struggles are all joined together here. It is no more and no less important than class and labor struggles or other battles over school policies and practices. It is not a replacement for other crucial issues, but one example of how certain issues require the building of coalitions across difference in order to effectively create counter-hegemonic alternatives.

Let us be honest. This will be very hard to do, as will be the maintenance of equally important class, race, and gender movements inside and outside of education. One of the major reasons for this is because of the increasing power of the new hegemonic movements that I talked about at the beginning of this interview. Ideological transformations that redefine citizenship, that redefine democracy, have as one of their effects that de-classing, de-racing, and de-gendering of people. That is, to define everyone as a consumer and democracy as individual consumer choice, is a radically individuating project with a

radically individuating set of identities attached to it. A politics of the left, or multiple politics of the left, then becomes even more difficult.

Interviewers: *In what other ways does the resurgence, or the strength of the current political right affect education?*

Apple: I would like to talk here more proximally, more practically, closer to the realities of classrooms. Let's take textbooks as an example. More and more as the right gains power, especially the religious right as well as the neo-conservative and neo liberal right, what we all too often find is the following at the level of the curriculum.

In the United States, even though there is no official rule that states this should be the case, the curriculum is the textbook in a large number of classes. Even though we don't have an official national curriculum in the U.S., and we don't have a national Ministry of Education that says that all teachers must use textbooks, it is quite clear that whether we like it or not, most teachers use textbooks. While they can choose among many texts, nearly all the textbooks look basically the same. This has to do with the political economy of textbook publishing. Textbooks are sold on a market and written to the specifications of what the most populous states want. Because of this market, any content that is politically or culturally critical or can cause a negative reaction by powerful groups is avoided. Thus, at the level of the textbook we are witnessing a growing movement away from any kind of provocative material. Anything that can jeopardize sales is to be avoided. This has created a situation of what has been called "dumbing down" (meaning trying to make the textbooks quite simple and bland). Another effect of the increasing power of the Right is the movement toward quite conservative positions, or away from many social democratic or certainly any radical position that might have been found in the core of the curriculum in earlier periods. Since the American curriculum was always a result of compromises over what and whose knowledge should be declared legitimate, it always had some progressive elements in it. Partially progressive discussions of race, gender, and class dynamics and histories had found their way into the curriculum after decades of efforts. While these elements are not now fully removed, they are made much "safer" and are integrated under much more conservative themes and perspectives.

These are important points because, in order for dominant groups to maintain their leadership, they have had to compromise. They had to have some content about unions, about women, about the lamentable past (and even present) of racial dynamics in their history. Currently, we are seeing a movement away from that. But, we are also seeing a movement towards certain other kinds of things. For example, for the neo-conservative right, the notion of tight control over schools becomes crucial as a way to make certain that the appropriate values and knowledge are taught to everyone. Of course, their definition of "appropriate" is very different than, say, an anti-racist perspective or one that assumes that knowledge is constructed through action, not pre-given and simply taught in such a way that the role of the student is only to master whatever content is given. Neo-conservatives

are pressing for “a curriculum of facts.” They want a national or state curriculum and national or state testing, and these in turn should be centered both around the “accepted” facts that make up “real” knowledge and on the measurement of outcomes in which students and teachers are to be held strictly accountable for such mastery.

But facts are not alone as an emphasis. Accompanying this is a neo-conservative emphasis on re-instilling values in the curriculum of a conservative kind, and also having these values emphasized in the curriculum, in our teaching practices, and on the tests. All of this is indicative of the fact that, while some of the latest reform rhetoric stresses decentralization, just as often in reality control is just as likely to be going more and more toward the center.

Neo-conservatives are not alone here, as I said. At the same time, the most powerful element within the new alliance surrounding conservative modernization--neo-liberals--want a closer connection between schools, and the (paid)economy. (This again demonstrates that underpinning neo-liberal positions are patriarchal assumptions.) One of the effects of this has been the growth of "school to work" programs.

Such things are contradictory. They have elements of good sense and bad sense within them. They involve positive possibilities in some ways, since many existing academic curricula are aimed toward university-bound students while the majority of poor students and/or even working class students will never go beyond secondary school. (Whether or not you feel that it is essential for all students to go beyond secondary is not the issue here, although I believe that the choice for them to do so should always be there.) This focus on “school to work” programs paradoxically provides an opening for a discussion of a focus on a polytechnic education as something that is probably wise for everyone, not just the working class. There is a long history such discussions, including the work of John Dewey and many others. Thus, oddly enough, neo-liberal positions can provide space for a different discussion.

But the way this discussion has been defined is exactly the opposite of such critical positions. Neo-liberals are critical of existing definitions of important knowledge, especially that knowledge that has no connections to what are seen as economic goals and needs. They want creative and enterprising (but still obedient) workers. Flexibility and obedience go hand in hand here. Due to this, a creative and critical polytechnic education that combines “head, heart, and hand” is not sponsored by neo-liberals. The possible space for that discussion is closed down by an emphasis on an education whose role is primarily (and sometimes only) economic.

The movements associated with this aspect of the right are having a profound effect at the level of textbooks, at the level of testing, and at the level of curriculum. To give another example, one of the mandatory courses that all teachers must take in my own home state, Wisconsin, in order to become licensed or certified as a teacher is "Education for Employment." The legislation that mandated this also mandated that every curriculum unit in every subject from kindergarten to secondary school must have identifiable elements concerned education for employment. Wisconsin has historically been one of the most

progressive states in the entire nation. The fact that it has such legislation speaks to the growing power of the hegemonic discourse of neo-liberalism. One can see, again, that the movement towards the right is having a profound effect.

Finally, there is the authoritarian populist right. They are making their position known quite strongly, and are increasingly influential, in conflicts over texts, over teaching and evaluation, and over the place of religion in the schools. (They want a “return” to fundamentalist and conservative evangelical religious emphases in the curriculum and/or a de-emphasis on secular perspectives in schooling.)

State sponsored prayer in schools is illegal in the U.S. (In some states you have moments of silence or the prohibition of state sponsored school prayers is simply ignored.) The re-emphasis of conservative religious impulses by authoritarian populists is making teachers quite fearful of being attacked. In many schools districts, teachers are increasingly cautious about what they teach and how they teach it, since they are deeply worried that the curriculum has become subject to severe criticism by religious conservatives, many of whom want to radically alter the curriculum to bring it into line with their own theological and moral positions. So, with the rapid growth of such rightist populism, there is a growing feeling right now of mistrust of teachers, mistrust of the curriculum, and mistrust of the very idea of public schools among such conservative advocates. Not only do teachers throughout the U.S. feel that they are under attack from these various groups, but there has also been a rapid increase in the number of conservative parents who are now engaged in “home schooling.” It is estimated that between 1.5 and 2 million children are now being schooled at home to “protect” them from the supposed ideological, spiritual, and moral dangers of public schooling. Obviously, I’ve only been able to give a bare outline of what is a very complicated, contradictory, and tense situation here. But I’ve discussed this in much greater depth in Cultural Politics and Education and especially in my forthcoming book Educating the “Right” Way.

Interviewers: *What restrictions do you now see as being imposed upon the scientific community? What will be the results?*

Apple: I think that here too there is exists quite a contradictory situation right now. That is, what is considered as science and as important and legitimate research has been impressively transformed, not only in this nation, but elsewhere. For instance, in 1970 when I gave my first address at the American Educational Research Association, I was one of the only persons out of 7 or 8 thousand researchers who was doing not only ethnographic research at the time, but ethnographic research that was socially and culturally critical. Now, there are many such researchers. Hence, when I look around this nation and many others, it would be impossible not to see the transformation that has occurred in what counts as “science”.

Currently on the terrain of legitimate research, there is ethnographic work (both descriptive and critical), critical historical work, and there is much greater emphasis on

conceptual work, narrative work, on life histories, analyses based on cultural studies, and so much more--all of which are now generally seen as legitimate. When you add to this the existence and rapid growth of multiple kinds of feminist research, post-colonial research, critical disability studies, critical race theory, critical discourse analysis, and many other exciting areas and approaches, I think there have been major gains.

However, as in my previous discussion, things do not only go in one direction. These emerging perspectives have also lead to a certain kind of fragmentation. There has been an accompanying growth of “private” languages and of esoteric ways of expressing our theories, which only specialists in a small area can understand. Thus, while the growth of multiple research perspectives has been for the good, one of the dangers has been that it has gotten harder for generally progressive researchers to communicate with each other easily. This must be overcome if we are not only to advance toward a more critically democratic set of perspectives and research agendas, but also to combine research approaches that enable activists and scholars to integrate their efforts to clarify what needs to be defended and what needs to be changed in current educational policies and practices.

At the same time as this is going on, there are pressures on universities – largely due to restricted funding – to limit what counts as legitimate inquiry, what counts as science, in the academy to only that which helps in an industrial project – or to the priorities and concerns of traditional positivist forms of inquiry. As one example, if we look at the emerging patterns of funding in educational research, those who are more deeply involved in testing, evaluation, and assessment or are interested in issues of achievement, not in who’s knowledge is actually being taught, are much more likely to get funded than those people who are more socially critical. This is not always the case, since some real gains have been made; but the general tendencies are clear.

Hence, there are visible transformations and pressures that are imposed because of the fiscal crisis in research funds. What passes as science have been broadened; but whether you ever get a chance to do it, and whether it gets published, are dependent in part on whether you have funds to be able to carry out the work. Once again, there’s a political economy of research funding, one that is organized around particular senses of what is important to know and what the legitimate procedures are to know it.

I need to make one other point so that I am not misunderstood. I am not arguing that quantitative research is unimportant. Nor am I arguing against the use of the best of statistical social and psychological perspectives. Indeed, critical qualitative scholarship often smuggles in statistical claims through the back door, so to speak. (Think of critical qualitative research on children in poverty where data on poverty rates, income, and so on provide the foundation for who one studies or which poor women, say, have their voices heard in one’s research on the effects of the growing impoverishment of women.) To be honest, I am coming to think that critical researchers and activists have actually participated in their own deskilling by labeling any quantitative work as “polluted.” This has been a disaster in some ways, since it often leaves critical work at a disadvantage when public debates occur. Think of the book The Bell Curve by Herrnstein and Murray that sought to

show that, genetically, Blacks were on average inferior to Whites in intelligence and that women were inferior to men mathematically. Not only was the volume fundamentally racist and sexist, it was statistically horribly flawed. No reputable population geneticist would ever make such claims on such poor data. In the public debates, Herrnstein and Murray were able to make their case into a seemingly more powerful one because few critical scholars actually were able to show how badly done it was empirically as well.

Interviewers: *Has the long U.S. history of opposition to communism caused a skepticism or outright rejection of critical theory due to its basis in Marxist assumptions?*

Apple: In many ways, yes. But it's important to remember that the U.S. has its own traditions of radicalism. I've said some things about this earlier when I spoke about why the left was under-developed and weaker here. However, it's equally crucial to understand how crucial race was in the United States. Class was often racialized and many radical movements grew up around issues of the intersection of class and race.

Interviewers: *What is your opinion of this movement toward national certification for teachers?*

Apple: Let me make a prefatory remark. I think that this issue has to be seen as coming at a particular time. I am not, in principle, opposed to national movements that are aimed at truly democratic reforms. The U.S. has a history of decentralization. Yet when we decentralize things--for instance, decentering decisions the from national level to the state level--capital and business interests have much more power actually at the state level than in Washington at the federal level. As an example, at a state level a large corporation can say to state government "Unless you give us major tax breaks, we will take our factories and move to another state or Mexico." This continues to happen repeatedly.

In this way, both global and local capital are, in essence, able to hold up, almost to rob, the tax system and use it for their own benefit. It's more hidden than going into a bank with guns saying, "Give me all your money." But in the long run in terms of the destruction of local communities, in terms of shifting the tax burden and the balance of power in their favor, they can do that more at a local or especially state level than they could at a national level when national unions can intervene. Because of this, some issues are better dealt with at a national level.

Now on to the issues surrounding national certification of teachers. At the same time as we are moving toward national certification of teachers – and this is supposedly part of a movement away from paper and pencil testing of teachers toward more performance based evaluations of teachers – there are other movements that it is linked to that may make it less progressive. If we are going to do this nationally, we want a way to know not just whether teachers know their subject matter, but also whether they can actually do creative and

socially and educationally critical things with students in schools. But let us be honest, in order for that to work, we would have to spend probably a billion dollars that we do not have now. For instance, in the public schools of many of our cities such as New York or Los Angeles, there are classes being held in toilets and in hallways. In Detroit, in many schools, three elementary classes must share one set of mathematics textbooks.

In the long run then, given the fact that we do not have sufficient money to provide the bare necessities for many of our children in urban and rural areas, either we will then have a national certification model that will be hardly enforceable and based on paper and pencil tests as usual or will establish two classes of teachers, a small one seen as elite and talented and a considerably larger one (the vast majority of teachers) seen as untalented and less worthy of respect, higher pay, and support. This could be a real disaster, given teachers' working conditions right now in all too many school districts in impoverished areas.

National certification could reproduce previous negative experiences and effects. It can have the same effect as the National Teachers Examination has had. This test has almost had a label attached to it which says, "If you are Black, or Native American, or Latino/a or simply poor, you will score more poorly on this test and it will not respond to your culture or your abilities, and it will increase the probability and possibility of having an affluent, largely White middle class teaching force even though the demographics of the United States are moving in exactly the opposite directions." This can also be especially dangerous at a time when at the national level, the neo-liberal and neo-conservative Right is growing in power and in its ability to control the goals, means, and content of education.

I am not in any way opposed to increasing the skills and experiences of teachers. But I am asking us if national certification, at time of resurgent national power of groups who have redefined the meaning, the means and the ends of democracy, is wise. Furthermore, there are more participatory alternatives to this, similar to what my colleague Kenneth Zeichner is doing on the development of critical and democratic models of teacher education and teacher development, models that are discussed in his book, Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling.

Interviewers: *You have discussed several issues concerning textbooks used in schools today. How can we improve the way the material included in textbooks is either selected or taught? Would we be better off without textbooks altogether?*

Apple: Let me initially answer the first question because it is easier. I am not a believer in textbooks. I think that often they are stultifying. On the other hand, and again I argue this in my book Official Knowledge, you have to understand that one of the reasons that textbooks became dominant in the United States is because we had a young teaching force made up mostly of (often very smart) young women in the elementary schools. There were multi-aged, often very crowded, classrooms where the teachers were responsible for every subject area. Given these conditions, teachers insisted on getting some help. They called for

standardized materials so that they would have time to actually do some teaching. The textbook was a partly progressive response, not just a regressive response. Oddly enough, then, it has a partly democratic history in terms of the labor of teachers. Teachers were saying "You can't expect us to teach everything, when we don't even have a library in these schools." Due to this, at the turn of the century textbooks and the advice of "experts" became even more powerful.

Even though textbook publishers were quick to exploit these conditions for their own benefit, the dominance of the standardized textbook was not because of publishers. It was also a response to a demand from teachers saying "Listen, I'm being exploited in this situation; I don't have time to do all this." (Of course, the development of the standardized textbook was also due to other dynamics: to worries about Americanizing the immigrants, to administrators assuming that women weren't talented enough to develop their own material, and to patriarchal assumptions about the need to control women's labor.)

On the whole, I think a textbook-based curriculum is a curriculum that tends to be boring and uncritical. It tends to not be democratic. To quote Stephen Ball, it is "a curriculum of the dead." In Democratic Schools, one of the things that James Beane and I try to do is to show a number of classrooms where teachers have moved to a negotiated curriculum and where the materials are built by teachers and students in direct response to local community problems. This seems to me to be a much more dynamic process than reliance on standardized materials that are too often outdated and conservative.

This does not mean that we can't intervene to make textbooks much better. There are things that we can do. But this intervention must be done with full realization of how the economics and politics of textbooks operate. In the U.S., texts are determined at a local or at a state level, depending on the state in which one lives. However, the southern tier of states (about 20 states) has state textbook adoption policies. They have established rigorous criteria that must be met for a book to be approved in those states. Three of the states--Texas, California, and Florida--control much of what will be published in the entire nation.

Since these are each among the most populous states and, in essence, they buy their textbooks statewide, publishers will only publish what sells in Texas, California and Florida. (Together, these three states make up around 35% of the textbook market. They also are the home of powerful conservative movements. Remember, Ronald Reagan was the Governor of California before becoming President.) Due to this, if you wanted to make a difference in the contents of textbooks, and in their organization, you would have to organize in those three states. This means progressive movements must learn what the Right has learned: to organize and target your movement well; to focus on those areas that have the largest potential for transformative effects; and to realize that it will take years of cultural efforts and political organizing. The Right did the hard work. So must we.

Interviewers: *What is your feeling about a national curriculum?*

Apple: Let me preface this by saying that I am not in principle opposed to the idea of

things being democratically decided and then being institutionalized at a national level. In my mind, however, the only reason for a national curriculum, the only reason, is to stimulate debate over what knowledge is important at every level from local schools to cities to states to regions. The only reason for even talking about it is to stimulate a national debate.

In the U.S., the movement toward a national curriculum, by and large, is a conservative movement, although it sometimes has more critical and more progressive elements in it. An example would be that some African American scholars want a national curriculum because for the first time it would guarantee that in very conservative, often racist school districts, you would have to teach the histories of people of color.

On the other hand, however, I think that moving toward a national curriculum at this time in the United States would be quite dangerous. One of the effects of having a national curriculum at this time in the U.S. is to legitimate and institutionalize a system of national testing. Both the neo-conservatives and the neo-liberal aspects of conservative modernization are strongly in favor of such a test. Once a national test is instituted, based on a national curriculum, in general the knowledge of elite economic and cultural groups will dominate. We know from past experiences in a number of nations that such groups have more of a voice and more power of getting their knowledge into the test.

Thus, I predict that a national curriculum will inexorably lead to a national test. I would also predict that the use to which the national test would be put in Washington and at the state level would be to justify cost cutting and expediency. Rather than showing which students need extra funding and support, it would confirm common-sense by tacitly underpinning a position that holds that poor and working class children are less intelligent. Once this is established as the common-sense again at a national level, there will be no more money given to those schools which in many places are in such economic crisis that many school districts in the U.S. will again have to close their doors earlier in the school year and not have children attend them the required 180 days a year. There would be no money to do anything else.

There is another danger in a time of neo-liberal “reforms” and that is that a national curriculum and a national test will exacerbate even more the process of turning schools into commodities. The neo liberal emphasis, remember, is on making the school either part of the economy or making it into a commodity itself. As has happened in England, where their national curriculum is sutured into the national test (the results of which are published as “league tables” in the press and elsewhere through which schools are compared), this provides a direct mechanism that enables the Right to put price tags on schools and say “This is a good school, this is a bad school.” In essence, it enables them to say “There's no more money to support real efforts at democratic school reform, so what we need to do then is marketize.”

This is direct link to voucher plans, which give parents a small amount of money for them to choose marketized schools. If you have higher incomes, you can supplement the public money from these vouchers and you can go to any school you want. It is a formula

for disaster.

These are complicated dynamics. A national curriculum and a national test will oddly lead both to increasing privatization on the one hand and increasing centralization of control over official knowledge on the other. It will place price tags on schools so that the market can function. The private sector for the affluent will expand and there will be a fiction of choice for the poor and working class. This is exactly what Whitty, Power, and Halpern found in their book, Devolution and Choice in Education and what Lauder and Hughes found as well in their own recent examination of the connections between neo-liberal markets, neo-conservative policies on curricula and testing, and inequality, Trading in Places.

The implications of this are profound. Federal and state money will increasingly go to private schools. More affluent parents will move their children out of underfunded public schools that will be falling apart and place them in private schools. They will refuse to pay taxes to make the remaining schools better. What we will have is highly controlled, highly policed, and decaying schools in the inner cities. That will be destructive for all concerned. In my mind, then, a national curriculum at a time of neo-liberal and neo-conservative hegemony is a formula for what I will call very bluntly simply "educational apartheid."

Interviewers: *Do you feel that NCATE and the other accrediting bodies have too much power?*

Apple: Definitely. As a matter of fact, the University of Wisconsin withdrew from NCATE more than a decade ago. One of the reasons was that accrediting agencies such as this have a universal model that they think that they can impose on every education program at every institution. Since at that time and now, we were considered in the national ratings to be the number one rated School of Education in the United States, the kinds of programmatic and bureaucratic reports and changes that NCATE requested seemed to be taking an enormous amount of time and money and were not thought to be very helpful. In our own deliberations, we were certain that we could do better on our own given our very real commitment to build a high quality undergraduate and graduate program in education. Hence, we did withdraw. While I think that there are elements of NCATE that are partly progressive, in general NCATE and similar bureaucratic accrediting agencies deserve the criticism they often get.

Interviewers: *What are the implications of Herrnstein and Murray's book, The Bell Curve for education?*

Apple: I must admit that at first I was amazed that it was published! Clearly, as I mentioned earlier, all of its logic and all of its data have been discredited before. As I said, no reputable geneticist would make the claim they are making. There is no genetic

argument you can make about large populations based on their analysis. We have been through the Arthur Jensen period before and we know that these kinds of claims are methodologically, ethically, and theoretically wrong. Statistically, as well, it's simply bad science.

What it proves is that the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Bradley Foundation, and other neo-liberal and neo-conservative “think tanks” are incredibly influential and very highly funded. They helped place Murray (Herrnstein died) on what seemed to be every talk show on television and radio and in every newspaper and magazine throughout the United States. They had millions of dollars behind the scenes sponsoring this. Even given this, its overt effects on educational policy, in the short term, have been relatively minimal. However, the longer term ideological consequences may be more hidden, but may have more lasting implications.

Even if it were true that on the average African Americans by and large have a lower I.Q. score (a simply disgustingly racist claim), we know that the tails of the curve overlap to such an extent that there's no educational policy you could make that would be different. Therefore, even if the book's claims were true, it would make no difference. On the other hand, what the book has done, in this time of growing reactionary politics, racist nativism, economic uncertainties, and possessive individualism, is to exacerbate these tendencies. People blame minority groups and immigrants for the problems of the economy. Economic fears are organized around rightist themes. Affirmative action for “unworthy groups” (both biologically and morally) and similar policies are seen as the root causes of social and educational problems. This enables dominant groups more and more to shift the blame away from their own culpability in making crucial economic and political decisions.

In essence, by exacerbating a situation where people blame all of their problems in the economy, with crime, and with a loss of security and tradition on even less powerful groups than themselves, this can destroy communities and any real sense of the common good. I find that very destructive. Its long term effects on education, then, may be in justifying even more cuts in funding for social services, health care, programs to expand educational opportunities, and so on. It will do this by confirming and legitimating in certain people their intuitions about “the Other” that they may have only partly had before, intuitions that often are quite racist. These hidden effects may be harder to see, but they are significant. Thus, even though things like The Bell Curve itself may not have a major effect on education in terms of obvious changes in policy and practice, this doesn't mean that its effects aren't there.

Interviewers: *Should there be a unified system of education? In this regard, let us give you some background. We have gifted education, and special education, reading education and vocational education. Should we have a unified system of education or should we have all this "splinter educations"?*

Apple: In part, we already have a unified system of education right now, but in a very odd

way. That is, schools function to sort and select. That's not all they were built to do, but it certainly was one of the reasons they were built and organized they way they were. Just read Horace Mann's original work--or any of the original early school builders--and you will understand that schools were there in part to be "vast engines of democracy." But these engines would be based on a vision of democracy in which some people would be leaders and some people would be followers. The unified notion of schools as sorting and selecting is very much "alive and well," as is the teaching of the structures of interpreting the world that dominate our society as I showed in Ideology and Curriculum.

We also have another strong element of uniformity, one based on the textbook. As I mentioned before, we have a national curriculum in the U.S., but it's unofficial. It is almost as if we had a Ministry of Education mandating that particular things be taught, but by ability.

More directly related to the interest behind your question, what should we have? My own position on this was stated earlier. In an ideal world, I think that a good education is a polytechnic education for everyone--that is, an education of heart, head, and hand for all people. We would not have tracking and screening. We would not have a differential curriculum which says that specific types of students will go to vocational training and others will go somewhere else. I find that very dangerous. In a time of declining resources, no matter what the rhetoric behind it, such differentiation simply leads to the rebuilding of traditional hierarchical models of the social division of labor through the school. Thus, I want a uniform model in terms of the way we think about an education for everybody. I want us not to negatively differentiate. I also am usually strongly in favor of inclusive education, that is of not having separate special education classes for students who are labeled as having emotional disabilities or physical disabilities, etc. I think that's important not just for the children who are labeled as having disabilities, but it is just as important for children who are not labeled that way. What kind of society are we producing when we separate out and do not have collective responsibilities so that our children don't know how to interact with everyone else?

On the other hand, while in an ideal situation I would prefer to have inclusive schools, on the other hand, in the realities of too many classrooms what we have now are rising class sizes, decreasing budgets, more social problems in the schools, and the intensification of teachers' labor. To quote from one of my friends who teaches in the schools of my own city, "Michael, I don't have time even to go to the bathroom during the day." Given this kind of situation, what is happening in many ways to teachers is that the rhetoric is saying "inclusion," but the reality says "Dump these children into a regular classroom, and give no help, no assistance, no resources to teachers who are already in conditions that make life extremely difficult." Hence, in the real situation in a considerable number of schools and classrooms, what we have is often equivalent to what we did when we closed mental hospitals in the U.S. We dumped people back into the communities and let them sink or swim, with little long-term support. And by and large, they sank.

Interviewers: *What impact do you think the current U.S. Republican Congress and the popular conservative radio commentator Rush Limbaugh will play in enacting a conservative agenda on education? What do you see as the components of their impact?*

Apple: In many ways, I've have answered some of this earlier. I think that all the trends toward privatization, marketization, tighter control of knowledge and values, blaming the schools for everything, and so much more will just be continued and will fester. We will have even better schools for the children of the affluent and even poorer schools for the children of the poor. The gap between rich and poor schools will widen measurably, as it already is doing. I also think that there will increasingly be the creation of a rightist "common-sense" which is once again exactly what we are seeing right now. In Official Knowledge, I argue that one of the major things the Right has realized is that to win in the state, you must win in civil society. That is, you must change a society's fundamental ideas about what schools (and all social policies) are for.

Rush Limbaugh is a spokesperson for much of the very large movement I've been talking about here. What people like him are now saying continues to be immensely damaging. Much of what they are saying is patently racist and sexist. But it does speak to the anger that has been organized around the themes that the Right has taken up. It speaks to a populist impulse; but that impulse has been colonized by the Right in powerful ways so that people who are angry about the ways they are treated and who are worried (justifiably) about their future and that of their children are brought under the leadership of the conservative alliance. There has been a very clever use of the discourse of "individual responsibility" here, a discourse that says that "we" are responsible and moral and "they" (people of color, the poor, immigrants, state employees, etc.) are not. What radio personalities such as Limbaugh do is legitimate the notion that people are poor because it's their fault, that people don't do well in school not because there are no jobs and no economic future, but because again they are stupid and have no character or morals.

This has meant and will mean the same in the future. I fear that we will have city, state, and national administrations that, in order to win the votes of those who are generating what might best be called "white anger," will be even more uncaring about the plight of those who are really on the bottom. The results of these policies will be covered up, using as rhetoric words that used to be socially democratic (democracy, freedom, etc.). In fact, one of the most powerful (and at times brutal) things the Right has done—and Rush Limbaugh has been effective in popularizing this strategy--is to take populist sentiments which are so popular and powerful in the United States (the language of "the people") and give them a rightist turn. A situation has been created in which the increasingly dominant perspective is one of "it's us against them," with the "we" being the hard-working Americans who somehow made it out of poverty by their own efforts, and the "them" who are African American, Latino/a, and other people of color. This is creating a climate in which racial and economic segregation is now called "choice." And it is justified using the

rhetoric of democracy as consumption practices. It's a brilliant strategy and the effects of it are all too visible all around us.

Given this, I am very, very worried about the future of American education. The transformations we are experiencing are very real. However, conditions have been bad before and the forces of thick democracy won major gains in previous periods as well. Because of this, and because of the continued work I am doing with progressive and critically oriented educators and activists in many nations in interrupting the Right, I am not pessimistic. Rather, I am an optimist without illusions. Raymond Williams was wise when he said that hope is one of our most valuable resources. Now, we have to act on that hope.

Notes

¹ This question can be found in: Holt, J. (1970). *What do I do Monday?* New York: Dutton. (N.T.).

² Apple, Michael W. (1992). Educação, cultura e poder de classe: Basil Bernstein e a sociologia da educação neomarxista. *Teoria & Educação*, Porto Alegre, n.5, p.107-132; Apple, Michael W. (1989). *Educação e Poder*. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas.

Contact

Michael W. Apple, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, United States of America.
E-mail: apple@education.wisc.edu

Interview

Interview conducted by Michael F. Shaughnessy, Kathy Peca and Janna Siegel, Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico.

Interview published in *Currículo sem Fronteiras* with permission of the author.
