

Introduction

It Could or Ought to be Different [?]

An ongoing and complex concern for educators in the history of schooling is that of knowledge. As we were able to analyze at great length elsewhere¹, this concern dates back to the Hellenic period. It is, in fact, a central concern within the educational field, in general, and the curriculum, in particular. This dissertation examines one of the most important international figures within the field of education, and one that for the last thirty years has helped us understand the intricate issues surrounding educational and curriculum knowledge. As you will have the opportunity to see, even in his earliest work, Michael Apple's political and pedagogical approach was driven by this concern. We have called his thinking 'organic intellectuality'. Making one's way through Michael Apple's prolific works, one is able to identify not only 'knowledge' as *a* central issue within his educational and curriculum oeuvre, but also—and this is of utter importance—how he points to educational and curriculum knowledge as a political issue, which is a result of powerful, complex, and constantly shifting compromises.

Harrington noted that “the average nineteenth-century prophet thought that capitalism would end volcanically, [in fact] capitalism is moving toward its end massively, imperceptibly, like a glacier, [and] its decadence is cold, not hot”². Therefore, a study such as this is profoundly relevant. On the one hand, we are analyzing the work of a scholar within the educational field, in general, and curriculum, in particular, who was able to pull to the fore the issue of curriculum relevance³, and in so doing destroy what Spring calls the “myth of neutral knowledge”⁴. On the other hand, Michael Apple's

¹ Paraskeva, J. (2001) *As Dinâmicas dos Conflitos Ideológicos e Culturais na Fundamentação do Currículo*. Porto: Edições ASA.

² Harrington, M. (1970) The Accidental Century. In R. Romano & M. Leiman (eds) *Views on Capitalism*. Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, pp., 421-450, p., 423.

³ Apple, Michael (1970) *Relevance and Curriculum: A Study in Phenomenology and Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Columbia University. Ed.D; Apple, Michael (1971) Relevance – Slogans and Meanings. *The Educational Forum*, May, pp., 503-507.

⁴ Spring, J. (1988) *Conflict of Interests. The Politics of American Education*. New York: Longman.

'organic intellectuality' is one of hope for all of those deeply concerned with a truly just and democratic society. In fact, in a moment when the Right has become more powerful than ever before (as we can see, say, from Ravitch's⁵ latest analysis of textbooks policies), and in a moment when the Left—especially within the U.S. context—is so fragmented, paying careful attention to some of Michael Apple's major claims give us tools to deconstruct both the Rightist arguments and fatalistic positions such as those presented by Rorty. In his work *Achieving the Country*⁶, Rorty put forward an analysis of the old and new Left academics. According to him, while the old orthodox Left struggled within the framework of constitutional democracy to protect the weak from the strong, the so-called new Left thought that it was no longer possible (to struggle for) social justice within the limits of a perverted social system. While we can identify palpable differences between the old orthodox Left and the new Left—a fact that Rorty does not deny—in fact, in a very quixotic way, Rorty⁷ argues that the new Left has sunk into a theoretical and philosophical pit of hopelessness. That is to say, in *Achieving the Country* one finds an embittered and disenchanted Rorty given the inconsequentiality of recent Left achievements. Rorty's message is a profoundly fatalistic cry. However, immersing oneself in Michael Apple's line of thought, a particular radical critical progressive curricular tradition, allows one to deconstruct not only the fallacies at the very root of Rightist arguments, but also the myth of despair (or the dead end) presented by scholars such as Rorty, since Michael Apple's analyses clearly document that the struggle for a just and democratic society entails a difficult but not impossible political journey.

This work points to our critical task—a constant struggle over what Macherey called "two questions"⁸. That is "[first] we must move outside [the work and then] in the second moment, we question the work in its alleged plenitude [not] from a different point of view, a different side—by translating it into a different language or by applying a different standard—but not entirely from within, from what he says and asserts that it

⁵ Ravitch, D. (2003) *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*. New York: A. Knopf.

⁶ Rorty, R. (1988) *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁷ Op. Cit.

⁸ Macherey, P. (1978) *A Theory of Literary Production*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p., 90.

says”⁹. In other words, “conjecturally, the work has its *margins*, an arena of incompleteness from which we can observe its birth and its production”¹⁰. Thus, our critical position lies in the “conjunction of [these] two questions [and] not a choice between them”¹¹. Could we have chosen another approach? Could we have accomplished such rich and distinctive results using a different framework? Drawing on Macherey, one could argue that “It could or ought to be different[?]”¹² Probably. Why not? However, as will be seen, we were able to critically analyze not only Michael Apple’s major arguments, but also the tension between the ‘spoken vs. unspoken’ within his political and pedagogical approach, quite important for understanding thoroughly the impact that he has had within the field of education, in general, and the curriculum, in particular.

Since the subject of this dissertation—Michael Apple and the curriculum field—shows the relationship between the personal and the political in education, I begin my next chapter on a ‘personal note’, one that will help the reader understand the power of the personal within the educational field, in general, and the curriculum, in particular. In so doing, we provide a way for the reader to apprehend as accurately as possible why the personal is so important within the next chapter and in the whole of this work. In this work, the reader will find that all authors are referenced by their surnames. We only use the first name in the case of Michael Apple, since he is the target of our research. In the case of scholars who co-authored material with him we also use the first name.

The second chapter aims to design and propose a framework of reference around the most significant roots which transverse the thought and the curricular path of Michael Apple’s work. On the third and fourth chapters, respectively, an exhaustive analysis of the conflicts that dominated the field since the end of the nineteenth-century was conducted. Both chapters must be perceived as wholes and this historical critical analysis is fundamental for the comprehension of the position assumed by Michael Apple in the great conflicts that have come to dynamize the field for more than a century. The fifth chapter analyzes a sample of some of the most significant works that make up the rich

⁹ Op. Cit., p., 90.

¹⁰ Op. Cit., p., 90.

¹¹ Op. Cit., p., 90.

¹² Op. Cit., p., 15

intellectual storehouse of Michael Apple's work, namely, *Ideology and Curriculum*, *Official Knowledge*, and *Democratic Schools*.

Finally, in the sixth destined for the final considerations, and although throughout the analysis in the fifth chapter we will not hold back from interacting dialectically with the thinking of Michael Apple, we will lay out in a more systematic manner our critical positioning in terms of the thinking and work of Michael Apple.