

Also by Michael W. Apple

Education and Power: Reproduction and
Contradiction in Education (1982)

Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy
of Class and Gender Relations in Education (1987)

Ideology and Curriculum

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

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Preface to the second edition

Spencer was not wrong when he reminded educators that one of the most fundamental questions we should ask about the schooling process is “What knowledge is of most worth?” This is a deceptively simple question, however, since the conflicts over what should be taught are sharp and deep. It is not “only” an educational issue, but one that is inherently ideological and political. Whether we recognize it or not, curriculum and more general educational issues have always been caught up in the history of class, race, gender, and religious conflicts in the United States and elsewhere.

Because of this, a better way of phrasing the question, a way that highlights the profoundly political nature of educational debate, is “Whose knowledge is of most worth?” That this is not simply an academic question is made strikingly clear by the fact that right-wing attacks on the schools, calls for censorship, and controversies over the values that are being taught and not being taught have made the curriculum into what can best be described as a political football. When one adds to this the immense pressure on the educational system in so many countries to make the goals of business and industry into the primary if not the only goals of schooling, then the issue takes on even greater salience.

Educators have witnessed a massive attempt—one that has been more than a little successful—at exporting the crisis in the economy and in authority relations *from* the practices and policies of dominant groups *onto* the schools. If teachers and curricula were more tightly controlled, more closely linked to the needs of business and industry, more technically oriented, with more stress on traditional values and workplace norms and dispositions, then the problems of achievement, of unemployment, of international economic competitiveness, of the disintegration of the inner city, and so on would largely disappear, or so goes the accepted litany. I predicted a rapid increase in these conservative tendencies when I first wrote *Ideology and Curriculum*. And while any

author is pleased to see that her or his predictions were accurate, it is not with any real sense of joy that I note these events, for the conservative restoration that lies behind them is having tragic effects on many people not only in the United States but in other nations as well.

One thing these alterations and tendencies do help make very clear, however, is the fact that discussions about what does, can, and should go on in classrooms are not the logical equivalent of conversations about the weather. They are fundamentally about the hopes, dreams, fears, and realities—the very lives—of millions of children, parents, and teachers. If this isn't worth our best efforts—intellectual and practical—then nothing is.

As a political activist, as a former elementary and secondary school teacher, and as a past president of a teachers union, for me these efforts came increasingly to focus on the **political nature of curriculum and teaching and of education in general**. *Ideology and Curriculum* represented one of the first major syntheses of these political issues. It seemed to me when I was originally writing it, and I am even more convinced now, that until we take seriously the extent to which education is caught up in the real world of shifting and unequal power relations, we will be living in a world divorced from reality. The theories, policies, and practices involved in education are *not* technical. They are inherently **ethical and political**, and they ultimately involve—once this is recognized—intensely personal choices about what Marcus Raskin calls “the common good.”²

To be concerned with issues of power—in my case with how class, race, and gender inequalities work through schools in the control of teachers and students and in the content and organization of the curriculum—is to stand on the shoulders of the many women and men who helped form those of us who work for a more democratized society. Even though I believed that it was essential that we politicize these issues much further than had been done in the past, the questions I asked in this volume have their roots in a long tradition—in Dewey's and Counts's attempts to define a democratic education, in past moments of democratic curriculum reform, and in efforts to teach “the knowledge of all of us” rather than only elite knowledge in schools,³ in Huebner's eloquent insistence that we cannot purge the personal, ethical, and political from the discourse of curriculum, in Greene's compelling arguments for the “existential situatedness” of ourselves as educators. We must choose and we must act. There really is no other choice.⁴

Of course, we never act in a vacuum. The very realization that education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture makes this clear. **After all, the decision to define some groups' knowledge as worthwhile to pass on to future generations while other groups' culture and history hardly see the light of day says something extremely important about who has power in society.** Think of social studies texts that continue to

speak of “the Dark Ages” rather than the historically more accurate and much less racist phrase “the Age of African and Asian Ascendancy” or books that treat Rosa Parks as merely an African American who was simply too tired to go to the back of the bus, rather than discussing her training in organized civil disobedience at the Highlander Folk School. The realization that teaching, especially at the elementary school level, has in large part been defined as women's paid work (with nearly 90 percent of elementary school teachers and over 65 percent of teachers overall being women) documents the connections between teaching and the history of gender politics as well.⁵ **Thus, whether we like it or not, differential power intrudes into the heart of curriculum and teaching.**

By asking us to see education relationally, to recognize its intimate connections to the inequalities in the larger society, I am self-consciously aligning myself with a program aimed at what I earlier called “the common good.” This program of criticism and renewal asserts the principle that “no inhuman act should be used as a short cut to a better day,” and, especially, that at each step of the way any social program “will be judged against the likelihood that it will result in linking equity, sharing, personal dignity, security, freedom, and caring.”⁶ This means that those pursuing such a program “must . . . assure themselves that the course they follow, inquire into, [and] analyze . . . will dignify human life, recognize the playful and creative aspects of people,” and see others not as objects but as “co-responsible” subjects involved in the process of democratically deliberating over and building the ends and means of all their institutions.⁷

As some of you may know, *Ideology and Curriculum* is the initial volume of a trilogy. It was followed by *Education and Power*⁸ and *Teachers and Texts*,⁹ as well as by a number of edited volumes that extended its original problematic and explored even more deeply the questions it raised, the actual content, organization, and control of curriculum and teaching, and student and teacher responses to these issues.¹⁰ As the first volume, however, *Ideology and Curriculum* established the problematic. It set the path for all that came after it.

In writing *Ideology and Curriculum* I sought to do a number of things. **First, I wanted educators, particularly those specifically interested in what happens inside classrooms, to critically examine the assumptions they had about what education does. These assumptions concern some very deep seated, but often unconscious, presuppositions about science, the nature of men and women, and the ethics and politics of our day-to-day curricular and pedagogic theories and practices.** I strongly believed then and still do today that the major way to accomplish this critical examination is to place our institutions of formal education back into the larger and unequal society of which they are a part.

Second, I wanted to bring a particular conceptual, empirical, and political approach to bear on this task. This approach had to illuminate

how education was linked in important ways to the reproduction of existing social relations. Yet at the same time, it had to avoid some of the mistakes of previous investigations of schooling in our kind of economy. It had to be critical and still resist the tendency to deal *only* with economic controls and “determinations.” It had to speak directly to cultural and ideological dynamics that were not totally reducible to economic relations, even though they were clearly influenced by them.

Finally, I felt it was necessary to get inside the school and rigorously scrutinize the actual curriculum—both overt and hidden—that dominated the classroom and then compare it to the commonsense assumptions educators had. My aim was to synthesize and reconstruct, and then go beyond, previous investigations of the social role of our widely accepted educational theories and practices. My arguments drew on aspects of “critical theory” and on some exceptionally insightful critical cultural and sociological work done in Europe to complement work already done by myself and others in the United States.

Behind all of these issues lay a particular set of questions. What is the relationship between culture and economy? How does ideology function? It is not enough to answer these questions in the abstract, however. As people concerned with education, we need to answer them in relation to one major institution, the school. Thus, we must rigorously scrutinize the form and content of the curriculum, the social relations within the classroom, and the ways we currently conceptualize these things, as cultural expressions of particular groups in particular institutions at particular times.

At the same time, and this is important for my arguments in *Ideology and Curriculum*, it is important to realize that while our educational institutions do function to distribute ideological values and knowledge, this is not all they do. As a system of institutions, they also ultimately help produce the type of knowledge (as a kind of commodity) that is needed to maintain the dominant economic, political, and cultural arrangements that now exist. I call this “technical knowledge” here. It is the tension between distribution and production that partly accounts for some of the ways schools act to legitimate the existing distribution of economic and cultural power.

My treatment of these issues is only in its initial form in this book and is expanded considerably in *Education and Power* and *Teachers and Texts*. But I hope it is clear enough for the reader to begin to see that what schools do ideologically, culturally, and economically is very complicated and cannot be fully understood by the application of any simple formula. There are very strong connections between the formal and informal knowledge within the school and the larger society with all its inequalities. But since the pressures and demands of dominant groups are highly mediated by the internal histories of educational institutions and by the needs and ideologies of the people who actually work

in them, the aims and results will often be contradictory as well. Whatever the aims and results, however, there are real people being helped and harmed inside these buildings. Wishful thinking and not confronting what may be some of the more powerful effects of the educational system will not make this fact go away.

In the years since *Ideology and Curriculum* first appeared, I have been more than pleased with its reception. The fact that it has been translated into many languages, that it is seen as a path-breaking book, and is widely read speaks eloquently I think to the honesty and openmindedness with which many educators, social scientists, policymakers, cultural and political activists, and others approach their tasks. Just as importantly, it also documents the constant struggle by these same people to question their present conditions so that they may act in more responsible ways. Not to engage in such continual questioning is to abrogate one's responsibility to the current and future lives of the thousands of students who spend so many years in schools. Self-reflection and social reflection are joined here.

The perspectives embodied in the book you are about to read are most concerned with the forces of ideological reproduction. What is dealt with in less detail is a set of concerns involving what has been called contradictory tendencies, resistances, and conflicts over these ideological forces. That is, cultural and economic reproduction is not all that is happening in our educational institutions. Even though *Ideology and Curriculum* focuses largely on one moment of a larger historical progression—that of the politics of domination—I cannot see how we can begin to understand “how relations of domination, whether material or symbolic, could possibly operate without implying, activating resistance.”¹¹ There are often people who, either singly or in organized groups, are now acting in ways that may provide significant bases for “counter-hegemonic” work as well. This should give us some reason for optimism, an optimism (without illusions) that is expressed and developed in my later books. The recognition of such “counter-hegemonic” work, however, means that analyzing the manner in which powerful conservative interests operate is even more important so that we can better understand both the conditions under which education operates and the possibilities for altering these conditions.

One other point needs to be made in this preface. Not only is the focus in this volume more strongly on forms of reproduction in education, it tends to stress class relations as well. Class dynamics are of immense significance and cannot be ignored. However, I have become more and more convinced that gender relations—and those involving race, which in the United States and in so many other countries are critically important—are of equal significance in understanding what the social effects of education are and how and why curriculum and teaching are organized and controlled. These arguments, as well, are elaborated at greater length

elsewhere.¹² It is sufficient, I think, to note here only how the problematic first established in *Ideology and Curriculum* has been markedly expanded to include the ways the contradictory dynamics of gender, race, and class operate in all their complexity in our institutions and how they may be leading in progressive, not only retrogressive, directions.

Parts of the argument made here rest on a critique of liberalism as the framework for social policy and educational theory and practice. While these criticisms of liberalism are essentially correct, liberalism itself is under concerted attack from the right, from the coalition of neo-conservatives, "economic modernizers," and new right groups who have sought to build a new consensus around their own principles. Following a strategy best called "authoritarian populism," this coalition has combined a "free market ethic" with a populist politics. The results have been a partial dismantling of social democratic policies that largely benefited working people, people of color, and women (these groups are obviously not mutually exclusive), the building of a closer relationship between government and the capitalist economy, a radical decline in the institutions and power of political democracy, and attempts to curtail liberties that had been gained in the past. And all this has been very cleverly connected to the needs, fears, and hopes of many groups of people who feel threatened during a time of perceived crisis in the economy, in authority relations, in the family, and elsewhere.¹³

These attacks, and the ease with which certain gains were lost, have led to a partial rapprochement with social democratic "liberal" positions. While liberal policies often acted to cover up the depth of our problems in education, the economy, and elsewhere, these policies did often include some real gains. Because of this, our approach to liberalism has to be more subtle. Our task is to defend the partial gains and rights won under the social democratic banner, and to expand and go beyond them to a more fully democratized economy, polity, and culture.¹⁴ Thus, while I still agree with my analysis of the ultimate weaknesses of liberal positions in this book, the context has changed. In a context where even liberal policies and rights are threatened, we need to focus our attention more on the threats coming from the authoritarian populism of the right.

Let me discuss this just a bit more. The resurgence of conservative positions is an attempt to regain hegemonic power that was threatened by women, people of color, and others. One need only read the pronouncements of William Bennett, the former Secretary of Education of the United States—with its emphasis on a common culture based on "our" western heritage and on a romanticized past in which all students sat still and internalized "our" values—to understand how powerful is the current urge to regain a lost consensus over what counts as legitimate knowledge.¹⁵ The questions surrounding what counts as legitimate knowledge and an analysis of the attempt to create a false cultural and political consensus lie at the very heart of this book. This makes many

of its arguments about ideology perhaps even more important today than when they were first written.

The current call to "return" to a "common culture" in which all students are given the values of a specific group—usually the dominant group—does not to my mind concern a common culture at all. Such an approach hardly scratches the surface of the political issues involved. A common culture can never be the general extension to everyone of what a minority mean and believe. Rather, and crucially, it requires not the stipulation of lists and concepts that make us all "culturally literate," but the creation of the conditions necessary for all people to participate in the creation and recreation of meanings and values. It requires a democratic process in which all people—not simply those who are the intellectual guardians of the "western tradition"—can be involved in the deliberations over what is important. It should go without saying that this necessitates the removal of the very real material obstacles—unequal power, wealth, time for reflection—that stand in the way of such participation.¹⁶ As Williams put it:

The idea of a common culture is in no sense the idea of a simply consenting, and certainly not of a merely conforming, society. [It involves] a common determination of meanings by all the people, acting sometimes as individuals, sometimes as groups, in a process which has no particular end, and which can never be supposed at any time to have finally realized itself, to have become complete. In this common process, the only absolute will be the keeping of the channels and institutions of communication clear so that all may contribute, and be helped to contribute.¹⁷

In speaking of a common culture, then, we should not be talking of something uniform, something all of us conform to. Instead, what we should be asking is "precisely, for that free, contributive and common process of participation in the creation of meaning and values."¹⁸ It is the blockage of that process in our formal institutions of education, and its very real negative effects, that I wished to deal with in *Ideology and Curriculum*.

Our current language speaks to how this process is being redefined. Instead of people who participate in the struggle to build and rebuild our educational, political, and economic relations, we are defined as consumers. This is truly an extraordinary concept, for it sees people by and large as either stomachs or furnaces.¹⁹ We use and use up. We don't create. Someone else does that. This is disturbing enough in general, but in education it is truly disabling. Leave it to the guardians of tradition, the efficiency and accountability experts, the holders of "real knowledge." As I demonstrated in this book, we leave it to these people at great risk, especially at

great risk to those students who are already economically and culturally disenfranchised by our dominant institutions.

Part of the reason I took, and still take, these issues of cultural politics and empowerment to be of such importance is autobiographical. I came of age in a poor family (but *only* in the economic sense of that word), in a very poor neighborhood in a dying industrial city in the Northeast—Paterson, New Jersey. The all too real struggles and insecurities of working-class life, its forms of solidarity and its politics and culture in the face of this, all formed me in significant ways. I have too many memories of the ways this rich culture was degraded in the media, in educational institutions, and elsewhere. I am all too aware of how whatever I have made of myself is rooted in the feelings, sensibilities, and richly contextualized meanings of the women and men of that neighborhood to feel comfortable with an economic system in which profit counts more than people's lives and an educational system that—despite the immensely hard and all too little respected labors of the people who work in it—still alienates millions of children for whom schooling could mean so much.

I cannot accept a society in which more than one out of every five children is born in poverty, a condition that is worsening every day. Nor can I accept as legitimate a definition of education in which our task is to prepare students to function easily in the “business” of that society. A nation is not a firm.²⁰ A school is not part of that firm, efficiently churning out the “human capital” required to run it. We do damage to our very sense of the common good to even think of the human drama of education in these terms. It is demeaning to teachers and creates a schooling process that remains unconnected to the lives of so many children.

These are, of course, complicated issues and, because of this, parts of *Ideology and Curriculum* are densely argued and I have sometimes made use of unfamiliar concepts. I end a more recent book of mine—*Teachers and Texts*—by calling for greater attention to the politics of writing, to writing in a way that makes one's arguments more accessible to the reader. In another way, however, it is important to realize that reality is very complicated, as are the relations of dominance and subordination that organize it. Sometimes understanding these relations requires that we develop a new language that may seem uncomfortable when first tried out. Learning how to use this set of concepts to look anew at our daily lives will take hard work, but it may in fact be necessary if we are to make headway in recognizing (rather than our all too usual misrecognizing) the contradictory ways education functions in our society.

Ideology and Curriculum was the result of nearly a decade long struggle to understand the politics of educational reality, and it shows the marks of that struggle in its concepts, language, and analysis. Yet so much of it still seems accurate and so many of the questions and issues

it examines remain critical in a period of conservative restoration²¹—of what Aronowitz and Giroux call “an age of broken dreams”²²—that I think on balance it was written as it had to be.

In *Ideology and Curriculum*, I sought to integrate into educational discourse a set of concepts and concerns that I believe continue to be essential to our deliberations about what and whose knowledge is of most worth. Much of my life as an activist, researcher, and teacher has been spent trying to bridge the artificial boundaries between, say, politics and education, between curriculum and teaching on the one hand and questions of cultural, political, and economic power on the other. These boundaries, as Pierre Bourdieu would say, are “pure products of academic reproduction.”²³ The foundation of such boundaries is shaky on conceptual grounds and is immensely disabling if we are to deal with the political realities of schooling in an honest fashion. Hence, part of my method here is “trespassing,” using tools built in critical theory, the sociology of knowledge, philosophy, and so on, and applying them to our commonsense thoughts and actions as educators. Again, following Bourdieu, “trespassing . . . is a prerequisite for . . . advance.”²⁴

This advance requires that the system of meanings and values that this society has generated—one increasingly dominated by an “ethic” of privatization, unconnected individualism, greed, and profit—has to be challenged in a variety of ways. Among the most important is by sustained and detailed intellectual and educational work.²⁵ This work will not be easily done; after all, so much of the cultural apparatus of this society is organized so that we don't get a clear picture of what lies beneath the surface. Ten second “news bites” and “sound bites” can't convey this. In the face of this, it is even more important that we do the work of cultural excavation, of uncovering the positive and negative moments of power, and restoring to our collective memories what differential cultural power has meant to a society in crisis.

There are, of course, some risks in doing this. Criticism makes people uncomfortable, and often criticism needs to be aimed at oneself as well. Also, saying things that challenge commonly accepted policies and practices can adversely affect one's career, and this has predictably occurred a number of times recently to critical educators at universities and elsewhere.

That taking such arguments seriously is itself a political act was documented very clearly to me by the firing of a teacher who wrote a review of *Ideology and Curriculum* in a journal for teachers in a country in Asia that has a history of repressive regimes. It was again made clear when I was placed under a form of house arrest and prevented from speaking to certain people in the same country. Ideas are weapons (if you will forgive the militaristic and somewhat masculinist turn of phrase); and spreading them in authoritarian contexts is a subversive, sometimes dangerous, and yet utterly essential act.

Yet could we, as educators, do less? Our task is to teach and to learn; to take our inquiries as seriously as the subject deserves; to take criticism of what we say respectfully and openly; to hunger for it so that we too can be called upon to challenge and reformulate our own commonsense as we ask others—like you the reader—to challenge your own. The journey we are embarking on—what Raymond Williams so correctly called the long revolution²⁶—requires such challenge and reformulation. It is a journey of hope, but one that is grounded in an unromantic appraisal of what confronts us as educators for whom democracy is not a slogan to be called upon when the “real business” of our society is over, but a constitutive principle that must be integrated into all of our daily lives. *Ideology and Curriculum*—with its limitations and silences acknowledged—is part of my journey on that path to cultural democracy. If it assists you as well, what else could any author wish for?

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NOTES

1. See, for example, Michael W. Apple, *Teachers and Texts* (New York: Routledge, 1986).
2. Marcus Raskin, *The Common Good* (New York: Routledge, 1986).
3. See Kenneth Teitelbaum, “Contestation and Curriculum: The Efforts of American Socialists, 1900–1920,” in Landon E. Beyer and Michael W. Apple, eds., *The Curriculum: Problems, Politics and Possibilities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 32–55.
4. This is discussed at greater length in Landon E. Beyer and Michael W. Apple, “Values and Politics in Curriculum,” in Beyer and Apple, eds., *The Curriculum*, pp. 3–16.
5. Apple, *Teachers and Texts*.
6. Raskin, *The Common Good*, p. 8.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Michael W. Apple, *Education and Power* (Boston: Routledge, ARK Edition, 1985).
9. Apple, *Teachers and Texts*.
10. Michael W. Apple, ed., *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education* (Boston: Routledge, 1982), Michael W. Apple and Lois Weis, eds., *Ideology and Practice in Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), and Beyer and Apple, eds., *The Curriculum*.
11. Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Loie J. D. Wacquant, “Toward a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop With Pierre Bourdieu,” *Sociological Theory* 7 (Spring 1989), p. 24. For a detailed analysis of some of the limitations of even this reformulation, see Philip Wexler, *Social Analysis of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1987).
12. See, for example, Apple, *Education and Power*, Apple, *Teachers and Texts*, and Cameron McCarthy and Michael W. Apple, “Class, Race and Gender in American Educational Research,” in Lois Weis, ed., *Class, Race and Gender in American Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 9–39.
13. I have analyzed this in considerably greater depth in Michael W. Apple, “Redefining Equality,” *Teachers College Record* 90 (Winter 1988), pp. 167–184.
14. See Herbert Gintis, “Communication and Politics,” *Socialist Review* 10 (March/June 1980), pp. 189–232. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).
15. William Bennett, *Our Children and Our Country* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).
16. Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (New York: Verso, 1989), p. 35–36.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 37–38.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
21. See Ira Shor, *Culture Wars* (New York: Routledge, 1986).
22. Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, “Schooling, Culture, and Literacy in the Age of Broken Dreams,” *Harvard Educational Review* 58 (May 1988), pp. 172–194.
23. Pierre Bourdieu quoted in Wacquant, “Toward a Reflexive Sociology,” p. 46.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Williams, *Resources of Hope*, p. xxi.
26. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961).