

doi: 10.26529/cepsj.493

## Interview with Michael W. Apple<sup>1</sup>

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JANEZ KREK

**JANEZ KREK:** Dear colleagues and distinguished participants, all very welcome. Michael W. Apple is the Professor of Curriculum and Instruction Theories and Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin, USA. In his research, he focuses on the critical analysis of the relationships between knowledge and power in schools and in society, and on the issues of the democratisation of educational policies and practices. As early as in the second half of the 1970s, he established himself globally with his critical theory, and is one of the most cited authors in the field. He received numerous high awards at home and abroad for his work. His monographs *Ideology and Curriculum* (Routledge 1979) and *Official Knowledge* (Routledge, 1993) are included in the international list of the most essential books in the field of educational science of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, with his entire opus, he is ranked among the fifty most influential contemporary authors in this field. Michael W. Apple's findings have not only become internationally acclaimed, but have also, in the last three decades, become part of the knowledge that we impart to students in certain subjects of fundamental education studies at our faculty. Michael W. Apple has also served as a member of the editorial board of the CEPS Journal since its founding. We are very glad that the University of Ljubljana has awarded him an honorary doctorate today.

*Dear colleague and distinguished professor Michael Apple, we are very privileged to have you here with us and to discuss with you about your theoretical work. However, before that, I would like to ask you to begin with some words about yourself and your life experiences which seem to be very connected with your engagement in education.*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** Forgive me, but I must speak in English. I am from the United States, and we assume that the rest of the world will speak English. Let me tell you a little bit of my biography since I don't think you can understand

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<sup>1</sup> On 6 December 2016, at a formal session of the University Senate, the University of Ljubljana awarded Professor Michael W. Apple an honorary doctorate. He was nominated for this most prestigious university recognition by the Faculty of Education, which submitted the proposal in view of Michael W. Apple's outstanding and internationally acclaimed research work in the field of critical theory of education, and for his cooperation with the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana. After the bestowal of the title, on the afternoon of the same day, we invited Michael W. Apple, as a visiting professor, to a seminar for students and the professional public, at which an interview and a discussion were undertaken with him. The transcript of this event is published here.

my work unless you see it as embodied in particular instances.

I am the first generation to finish secondary school on time in my family. I come from extremely impoverished backgrounds and from schools that are famous for people going to prison. My brother and I were among the few white children in one of our schools, and the majority of children did not graduate and wound up in state penitentiaries. But I also come from a family of three generations of printers which is the most radical union labour in the United States, except perhaps for women's labour in the garment industry and the textile industry. That's very important because in order to understand me; this requires a sense of printing being the occupation in which critical literacy is what gives it its meaning. It is about the written word. I went to undergraduate school all at night at a small state teacher's college while I worked as a pressman, as a printer during the day. But it is also a history in which such work was strongly unionised. Added to this is the fact that I come from a communist family (but one that was not simply content to follow what the leadership of the Party said). My father came from a Socialist family but later in life became a Maoist. Finally, even though my mother never completed secondary school, she was an anti-racist and anti-corporate activist whose life was organised around mobilising with others in our very poor community to try to make life better and more equal.

I mention this in part because I am carrying a particular tradition that says that education is not simply for economic mobility but that the written word is to be cherished and cultural forms are absolutely central to paid labour and to understanding who one is. Let me move on to other parts of my biography. Before I even finished my undergraduate degree, I became a teacher. Oddly, the army made me a teacher, so you're looking at sergeant Apple. It was not my choice to be in the army at all, but you went to jail if you did not join the army. It was forced. They've trained me as a teacher. After my army experience, I went back to teach in the same poor slum schools in which I had attended as a child. This is crucial. In order to understand my critical work, it has part of its beginnings in reaction to the way in which I as a poor and working-class child was treated as if I did not have a brain. The assumption was that we were not as smart as other people, that we could not do serious mathematics or science and our task was simply to be trained as low-paid labour. It also meant that when I went to be trained as a teacher we were treated in exactly the same way. So, my undergraduate degree is at the lowest level of higher education possible at a small night school. All the courses were organised so that we received lower skills and knowledge and focused on practical skills. The course names signify this. There was 'Physics for Teachers,' 'Philosophy for Teachers,' 'Mathematics for Teachers,' everything for teachers. The assumption being that if you're going

back into these same slum schools, as long as you could read the textbook, had some skills, and had the official piece of paper that said teacher on it, that was enough. Thus, part of the radical position I want to take now, one that I'll go on in few minutes to explain, is in reaction to that. It's part of the basis of my worries that one of dangers of some current critical theoretical work is the assumption that theory is somehow up here, disconnected from the reality of people's lives and certainly in my case it is exactly the opposite. It is partly in reaction to the way in which oppressed people, poor men and women are treated by school systems. There's a robust literature on that to say the least. This is definitely NOT meant as an anti-intellectual position in any way. The basis of my work also is grounded in some crucial theoretical traditions. Thus, while I ask 'simple questions' about the political, ideological, and conceptual groundings of dominant educational and social policies and assumptions, these come from other education I have had. For example, I have a master's degree in Analytic and Continental Philosophy, so I demand a sophistication that I think is missing in all too much current supposedly critical work. I also have a doctorate that involved a joint degree in Philosophy, Sociology and Curriculum Studies. But again, remember that I'm also the former teacher and vice principal of elementary, middle, and secondary schools, so I always want to ground my work in particular kinds of things that involve an epistemological and political commitment that the best theory is done in relationship to its object—school, communities, social actors, curriculum, teachers, policies, and practices. I have two agendas: The first is understanding how power works and the creation of inequalities, understanding why teachers are treated so poorly in so many nations, and why poor people and minoritised people are demonised; the second is trying to figure out how to change these conditions, to interrupt them. So, while I do academic work, it is academic work aimed at social transformation. The simple questions I ask are these: whose knowledge is taught; whose knowledge isn't; who benefits from the way this society, including your own, is organised; who does not; and what can people in education do about it and why should we focus on education? I ask these because I think that education is fundamental to social transformation, something that I argue at much greater length in a series of recent books. Is that enough for now?

**JANEZ KREK:** *Yes, thank you, it's been very illuminating. Now, I will start with some very basic questions. In Slovenia and in Central Europe, it is common to use the term 'pedagogy'. This is not the case in the English language, culture and educational theory, where 'education' is the more common, overarching term. You have nonetheless obviously decided to use 'pedagogy' in some crucial concepts that*

*define your work, such as 'critical pedagogy'. What is the meaning of the term 'pedagogy' in your theory, and why is it used? How would you define 'critical pedagogy'?*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** There're two philosophers that I think are very useful for one's thinking about this. One is Austin, and the other is Wittgenstein. They both make a case about how you understand language. Their position says this: don't simply ask for the meaning of words. Most words that are important are what are called in English and sociolinguistics 'sliding signifiers.' That is, they're empty, like glasses into which meaning is poured. In this case, the word is pedagogy or education. And the question we should ask is whose water gets poured into it. The best way to begin to answer this question is to focus on the use of the term. That means you must understand the history of particular terminology and why there may be differences in our nations, but also differences in people's careers.

I have historically not used words like pedagogy. Take as an example my book *Teachers and Texts*. It doesn't say 'Pedagogy and Texts', it says 'Teachers and Texts'. So up until recently – in *Ideology and Curriculum*, my first major book published in its first edition in the mid to late seventies I don't think the word pedagogy is in there. And that is because I come from a tradition of anti-racist and anti-capitalist work where teaching was seen as a broad term. But behind this is also the fact that in the United States and many other nations, teaching was seen as connected to women's paid work. The vast majority of teachers are women and they call themselves teachers. That particular word was and is a demand for respect. It was grounded in a view of teaching as a profession. -This is a complicated history and I'm not totally in agreement with that depiction with what is happening to teachers, but the word is still important. A more substantive understanding would require much more than simply an account of the history of professionalism and its use. But it would certainly need a substantive understanding of gender and class – and race in the US. But no matter what, we still need to see it as a demand that the word teaching should be used because it was connected to people's daily lives. Words such as 'pedagogy' were not prevalent in the US. 'Teaching' had a long history in anti-racist work and in the history of gender and class struggles for equality.

I'm one of the people who (along with Rima, my wife who is a well-known scholar in the history of women's health and women's studies) is committed to listening carefully to the ways in which 'ordinary' words get turned into partly 'counter-hegemonic' words in real day to day struggles by oppressed groups. This is partly connected to the fact that while both Rima and I are

political activists, a politics in which the politics of language often plays a key role. My activism is also linked to the fact that I am a former president of a teachers' union – not a 'pedagogues' union. The use of 'teacher' continues to connect me to the history and current struggles over demanding respect for teachers. This can be seen in my work over the years. From the very beginning, to me the words 'teaching' and 'education' were more important. The word 'pedagogy' only later enters my vocabulary in a more powerful way.

After the translation in Brazil of a number of my earlier books, I was asked by Paulo Freire to come to Brazil – and his term was not 'teaching', it was 'critical pedagogy'. It had a more Latin-American and European connotation. In my discussions with him over a number of years, it was clear to him and other activists there that the word pedagogy was not simply the act of 'teaching', it also was a theoretically rich word that also embodied social settings, social connections, and institutional and political forms and practices inside education. It was different than didactics, which was more affiliated in some ways with a sense of teaching as a method. For me, teaching was never reduction to a method. It was a broader term. But as I began to work with Paulo Freire, in part because of that book *Teachers and Texts*, which was translated in Brazil along with *Ideology and Curriculum* and *Education and Power*, and I too began to see more power in the ideas behind (critical) pedagogy. My books became movement books as they did here in the mid-'90s. Paulo Freire asked me to come. He was the father of critical pedagogy and the genesis of this more politicised understanding of pedagogy within Latin America. Working with Paulo was significant on both of us. One of the reasons I was invited was not only because a number of books had become 'movement books' and had become very influential there.

There were also more practical reasons. Paulo had correctly brought in many militants, most of whom were male, into the Ministry of Education when he was elected as minister of education of Sao Paulo. He brought in many people to transform schools. Well, that's interesting since they indeed were mostly men. The book I noted earlier, *Teachers and Texts*, is about the history of how teaching becomes women's paid work. And when something becomes women's paid work it gets less respect, less autonomy and historically less pay. In addition, it also gets blamed for nearly everything that is wrong in society. So, these men went in and had a tendency all too often to be less than respectful to women teachers' understandings and skills. Let me say first that I have an immense amount of respect for the dedication and hard work of these militants. They were often brilliant strategically and very smart politically, but they treated women in the same way that too many ministries of education did which

is: you teachers don't know what you're doing. So, I was in part brought in by Paulo to act as the... in English we have a word called 'buffer', which means the safe space in between things. Thus my task was to act as this puzzling 'buffer' position, to tell the male militants about women's paid work and to help to create a more respectful environment that was still very critical but did not act to alienate some of the groups of teachers who were essential to the task of building a more responsive and counter-hegemonic education. That's a little strange especially since as I noted my wife is a professor of History of Medicine and Women's Studies. It would seem odd that a man was brought in but, given the machismo culture of parts of Latin America, it would be accepted if a man said it and not accepted as much as if a woman said it. I certainly dislike that, and, honestly, I'm not certain it was a wise choice for me to do that, but it was effective. So, I began to be in an institutional form where critical work in education is being done, but it was called critical pedagogy not 'teaching'. – As you can see, this is the context that gave particular meanings to these words.

But there is an additional context. Whether I like it or not, 'critical pedagogy' has been the phrase increasingly used internationally for the broader issue of critical education. Its development, by the way, is not in schools at all. Rather, historically, its use is grounded in the educational approaches developed from working with peasants who have dropped out of schools and later become engaged in critical literacy practices in rural communities. The use of it involves a paradoxical and very contradictory assemblage of political uses. Much of its history has been evacuated and has been turned into a set of slogans that has been all too often disconnected from its roots in radical policies and practices. Speaking honestly, unfortunately it's then appropriated by upwardly mobile academics to pretend that they're doing radical work in the United States. It too often involves a search for prestige.

To talk about 'teaching' has less prestige because the word itself is 'teaching'. That's a low-status area, one seen as partly feminised given particular patriarchal assumptions guiding the academy and its hierarchies, certainly in my own nation. But if you could say 'pedagogy', it has some sort of Greek inflection, and it makes it seem as if one is higher status. 'I'm a pedagogue, not simply a teacher'. Again, I want us to think about the use of these words. This is where Bourdieu is very wise as a sociologist. The ease with certain academic talk is represented in one's ease with the body and with established forms of high-status cultural capital. It acts as part of a conversion strategy. If I'm in education – that's nice. But if I'm in pedagogy – that's much better, especially if one is in an already lower status academic discipline. In order to make a difference and to interrupt this conversion strategy, I had to create a phrase such as 'critical

educational studies.’ This was created to include both academic work and work in schools. In doing this, it also called upon me to use the language that began to circulate. Even though it basically had little meaning different than ‘teaching’ when it was imported into the United States, this is pedagogic language. I want to use the language of ‘pedagogy’ and especially ‘critical pedagogy’ in a way that moves it from being largely about the ways that middle-class academics solve their problem of class mobility within the academy to restoring its political history and groundings in real life. If you know my most recent work, I have criticised many of these largely rhetorical positions within the existing critical pedagogy literature very strongly, even if I’m one of the founders of what is called critical pedagogy in the United States. I’ve spent a lot of years criticising the way that term is used since I come from being a teacher, and I think that our work – I am what’s called a critical materialist – should again be grounded in an epistemological position that the best theory comes from being engaged with the object of one’s theory, which is schools, curriculum, teaching, and literacy practices for me.

So, I hope that you will forgive if I get a little upset by people who continue to have these incredibly abstract discourses about critical pedagogy. Theory is of course absolutely essential to critical work and to continuing the traditions (the plural is important) of powerful analyses. But when I look around, too often what has been done is to ‘academicise the political, rather than politicise the academic.’ Because of this, I remain worried that a good deal of the work in critical pedagogy tacitly functions as the reproduction of prestige hierarchies in universities. Let me be clear that it doesn’t have to do this. When Paulo Freire and other folks used that term – and the tradition of the use of the term ‘pedagogy’ here – it is a richer term. But when it is imported in the United States and England and elsewhere, it’s made safe. It’s simply used to say: look at me, look at me, how sophisticated I am. I find that troubling because I’m an educator, and I’m quite proud of that. Thus, while new words are indeed important, at times, I prefer to demand respect for the words that are used and have a history in my own nation. I don’t want to claim that we shouldn’t use pedagogic words but certainly in the circles that I participate in the word ‘pedagogy’ (especially when it is paired with the critical) has now too often been made simply rhetorical, safe and limited. I know few teachers who talk about pedagogy. I know teachers who talk about teaching and curriculum. And about communities. And those are more specific. The tradition here and in Latin America clearly is a richer sense of that. But in my own historical and political context, I would prefer to use the language that has not been made safe, that is not too often masquerading as radical.

**JANEZ KREK:** *In the last four or five decades, the period since the beginnings of your theoretical work, a great deal has changed in the world. What are the most important political or/and social changes and the most notable theories (or authors) that have influenced your theoretical work in this period?*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** We can start out with a book that again took me seven years to write. I started it in 1971, and it was published in 1979. That's *Ideology and Curriculum*. And again, all of these things are intertextual. I was responding to traditional Marxist debates about education. Those traditional debates were influenced by limited or simply bad readings of Marx. Often – but not always – they assumed that education simply was a mirror of the economy. The economy was only represented by its male proletarianised labour, and it was determined by what is called the automaticity thesis – that is it's automatic. If you all get poorer and poorer, you join revolutionary groups and overthrow capital. It's some sort of an automatic response that naturalises the process of transformation as an already known teleological dynamic. That means that cultural form and cultural content and the state and cultural/political mobilisations etc., are relatively inconsequential, they're less important. In these accounts, schools only reproduce class relations. I felt that that was inadequate, and I was strongly influenced by people within the multiple Marxist and neo-Marxist traditions that said culture counts and counts in incredibly important ways. This means that schools could not be ignored. Under previous theories, the best example would be something like Bowles and Gintis and their book *Schooling in Capitalist America*; these had what is called 'identity theory', which says this: nothing that goes on in schools is important except for a hidden curriculum. I'm also a theorist in the hidden curriculum, I think it's very important, but to them it makes no difference what you teach – whether it's working class history or people's science or mathematics for social justice. It's 'nice' to teach these things, but it makes no difference in the world whatsoever because you have to focus on the paid economy. This obviously is quite gendered. They hardly ever talk about women's unpaid work and so many other things.

The sense was that the only important thing that the schools would teach would be this hidden curriculum of docility: doing whatever people in power need and that was differentiated. Rich kids get autonomy and get whatever they want; poor kids get told to shut up. It's more complicated than that. And they forgot about key Marxist concepts like contradiction, and neo-Marxist ideas about the power of culture. People were basically seen as puppets. Whatever capital needs – schools do. As I mentioned earlier, I spent a number of years teaching and was a militant within teacher unions. That experience is carried



with you. Thus, these reductive and largely mechanistic positions seemed like an inadequate understanding of what was going on.

I was influenced by Antonio Gramsci, who argues very strongly about the nature of struggles over common sense. Indeed, if you want one phrase to describe much of my work it can be contained in one sentence: I am interested in the nature of common sense. How it works, how people get convinced to go to the Right – these are words to talk about later – rather than to go to the left. For instance, in my own nation, we now have an incoming president called Donald Trump. (Perhaps I should consider moving to Slovenia? That's not a joke. The fact that I've been here since '89 also makes me feel at home here.) There is an important issue in which I am interested in: how is that possible? Gramsci argues very strongly that the nature of common sense is contested. There's no such thing as false consciousness – people are not puppets. They have elements of good sense and bad sense. The task of dominant groups is to attach themselves to the elements that are 'good' in people's understanding. I wanted to merge that with my training in phenomenology. I have both analytical and philosophical background but also training – education – in more continental forms. Habermas was very influential on me and not Husserl at all since I think it's quite romantic in some ways and impossible to achieve. The transcendental epoché seems like a bizarre concept to me. We may have an argument about this later. But I'm interested in people like Alfred Schütz who was a sociologist of knowledge, a key part of my background. He – and I – were deeply interested in the question of how knowledge is distributed, whose knowledge is there, the legitimisation processes of knowledge, so that's informing me. The first series of my books are also informed by that issue.

A third person who was very important to me in my formation is Raymond Williams. He, like me, comes from the working class, was a son of miners from Wales, an adult educator who then went on to a Professorship at Oxbridge. He wrote books like *The Country and the City* and also wrote the book that had a strong influence on me, a book called *A Long Revolution* which says that you cannot stop critical literacy practices and people building their own literacy ultimately over a long period, a long *durée*, as it is called in French. In the long *durée*, there are mobilisations that will interrupt dominance. I took these themes up, largely focusing on people's daily lives and culture, with an emphasis on schools. In response to the overly reductive theorists like Bowles and Gintis and similar overly economic positions that ignored culture, what is actually taught in schools, and the state, my focus initially was on the curriculum itself and how it's organised, which also makes a strong difference on the hidden curriculum and on what is actually taught in schools. In *Ideology and*

*Curriculum*, as an example, there's empirical work about what happens in kindergarten classrooms where children are taught that what is work is important, what is play is unimportant. If we look at the spatial politics of the classroom, things for play are up high, where the teacher can reach them, things down lower are things for work.

Clearly, students are being taught what is important is work. Because anything that is for play is out of reach. I wanted to show that what goes on in classrooms is actually crucial and the struggle over curriculum is crucial. I made connections with people like Raymond Williams but also other people working on similar projects. Basil Bernstein's work in England was important to me, especially when he said that the way the curriculum is organised, whether it's separate subjects like farm silos, or integrated curriculum, spoke to class dynamics. Thus, if you're an 'amateur' and you have money you can be someone like Darwin. You are funded, self-funded to do immensely interesting research in evolution. But it required you to be rich – to be the rich amateur to do this. I personally have been involved in teaching about and building integrated curriculum, especially critical curriculum. But at the same time, Bernstein is saying that's also a class discourse. Capital has changed, new classes have evolved, the new middle class becomes very important, and they have expertise and computers, accountability, measurement, making advertising. Nearly all institutions are influenced by such expertise. These influences and the power of the cultural and social capital of these emerging new middle-class factions cut across the usual institutional and disciplinary boundaries. This realisation meant that my rather romantic vision of integrated curriculum as being better than something else still reproduced class relations.

This emerging focus of my work then created international connections with a group of people. The analysis needed to be made more complicated. Romanticism, even in the practical political work I was doing, needed to be approached with great caution. But Gramsci also pushes me in ways that remind me of Althusser in particular. That's the notion that ideology is everywhere. Bourdieu as well helps us again to see it everywhere, even in the most mundane experiences of eating, drinking listening to music, etc. However, again I was strongly committed to a position that says people are not puppets. So how would I explain the fact that there are resistances and struggles? So, at the end of *Ideology and Curriculum* I say let us no longer only-focus simply on reproductive forces and dynamics in lived reality, but let's restore agentic work. The word agency will become crucial in a second. Certain people help me think about that.

Let me give an example of how it's important to think about this.

Althusser says ideology is not just in texts... it's not just in the formal curriculum and how it's organised. It's everywhere. Now, that's a very dangerous position to take because if everything's ideological it doesn't give you any purchase on what isn't ideology. It's an important claim, but it's all too general. It's like saying everybody breathes. Okay, that doesn't tell me much. But Althusser is saying ideology is everything. So, I give one example: I got a fellowship to study philosophy at Columbia University. It's the strongest philosophy programme in the United States. I had come from night school and had only one philosophy course at night at my small undergraduate college. I passed it, thank god. But I'm now at a prestigious programme in a prestigious university. Think of my experience. I walked into my course in epistemology at Columbia as a first-year graduate student and everyone would have gone to elite universities, everyone but me. They were sitting like this [demonstrates]. Their bodies were comfortable. They embodied an ease of being there and their bodies showed it. They looked totally comfortable. I want you to notice the way I'm sitting here at the University of Ljubljana? Even though I'm comfortable here, I'm with friends and have great mutual respect for my teachers here in Ljubljana, I sit very straight. I don't look very relaxed. Instead, I look very intense, like this. But in that epistemology class at Columbia the meaning of my body was very much related to my social class location and trajectory. If the professor of that class had sneezed, I would have asked him to spell it. Now that experience, that Althusserian moment connects me with Bourdieu as well. The body hexis is this. It is the ease of the body – not just the content, but how comfortable you are with it. That meant the body became more important. But very importantly it also meant that there must be holes in this process of class identity and bodily reproduction, because while I am there in that philosophy classroom., I am also rejecting half of what am I being taught. For me, the entire context is pretentious, a form of elite foolishness. Let me stress that I wanted serious philosophical knowledge. Indeed, I demanded it. But I wanted knowledge connected to daily life; I wanted it to be really sophisticated. But I wanted respect for what I too knew. Perhaps this is why social phenomenology was a strong influence on my work.

In order to understand not just my complicated reactions to elite institutional forms, but also the reactions of so many others, it became even clearer to me that I had to then understand the concept of agency in a much more detailed and nuanced way. Among the more significant books that helped me and others was Paul Willis' book called *Learning to Labor* – a very famous book that could use a little more of a psychoanalytic framework, but it's still brilliant. It argues again the Gramscian point that things are complicated and contradictory,

people can have elements of good sense and bad sense. He studies young men who reject the hidden curriculum in schools but at the same time reproduce it.

That cements in my mind the power of Gramscian understanding. That there are elements of good sense and bad sense. For me then, agency becomes even more important, not only because it enables me to balance the claims of reproduction with those of the inherent contradictions of institutions and daily life not only on an abstract theoretical level (though that was important) but at the level of concrete experience in schools, families, communities, and people's understandings of who they were and what their possibilities were collectively and individually. This opened a door for me to some post-structural analyses and to other people who were 'between traditions' such as Stuart Hall and others. I knew that I had to be very careful here. Some post-structural material is more than a little problematic. And many 'posties' see their approach as a full replacement for more structural analyses. This is a mistake. Foucault is brilliant about many things, but his work is not a full replacement for Marx and the entire set of creative traditions of cultural, political, and economic analyses that grew from that origin. The focus on discourse makes major contributions, but it carries with it a number of problems. Political economy is not a discourse. People are dying, starving, bodies of children are washing up on beaches. We make discourses about such things. But anything that rejects or causes me or anyone else in this room to largely reject a material understanding of reality in connection with cultural forms and internal struggles that are also structured, is damaging.

However, as I said, even with these problems, there are still important things to learn from these theories. Given this, I then turned to and incorporated some post-structural understandings of identity, of discourse and its power on the body, at the same time as I laboured to keep alive the understanding that this is capitalism and that makes a really big difference. But it's capitalism not only for male workers. Capitalism is a class project, but it's also a racial project and a gender project. So, I want to look then at women's agency. To women who learn this hidden curriculum, do they talk back? – Of course, they do. I begin to look more in books like *Education and Power* and *Teachers and Texts* (the latter book being strongly influenced by my wife Rima and her work on the narratives of women's lives) to think about much more substantively what women's lives and struggles are like, what does that mean, how do women resist, do they just internalise these kinds of things or are there elements of good sense and bad sense. This is also accompanied by similar issues surrounding 'race' and how it is produced and experienced. Remember, I had been an anti-racist activist from the time I was a young man, so this was constantly on my mind anyway. Furthermore, as the parents of a Black child, (our older son Paul), and as a political and anti-racist activist, it

was clear to me that young Black men and women do not merely internalise the identities and racialising and gendered forms of marginalisation that dominate our societies. Their lives and lived cultures are filled with complex understandings – and again elements of good and bad sense that can interrupt dominance.

Let me give an example from my own experience as a young teacher in the slums of an old industrial city on the east coast of the United States. Let us pretend that Michael Apple is now back teaching the 6th grade in this very poor school that is filled largely with Black and other minoritised students. And one child says: Mr. Apple, may I sharpen my pencil? And I say: Of course. And the child gets up and his walk to the pencil sharpener takes what almost seems to be three days. He just as slowly sharpens the pencil with a smile on his face like this. That seems to take another three days. And on the way back as he passes by his friend, he hen pokes her playfully with the sharpened pencil. She goes 'ouch!' and he smiles as if nothing has happened. And he smiles back at the entire class – and ironically at me – knowing that he and the rest of the class now have the teacher's attention. That they control the classroom, Michael doesn't. I don't mean this to be cute. I'm trying to understand the daily realities in the ways that ideological form works and what we can do about it. So that requires that I begin to think about identity work. It means that Judith Butler's work becomes useful. The work for instance, of Lacan and other similar theories need to paid attention to (but very carefully). And it means that I have to then begin to think through feminist understandings of bodies, and even more substantively about anti-racist and post-colonial work. This continued openness to multiple critical theories and traditions means that I am a *bricoleur*. But it also demands that I work as hard as possible to take seriously the criticisms of each of these traditions so that when I try to employ, then I am doing so in a manner that recognises the limits as well as the gains of being a *bricoleur*.

I find that a satisfying position. I have two legs. One and a half of them are within Marxism and the Marxist and neo-Marxist traditions, from the original texts, actually. I want to return to the original texts of these multiple traditions whenever possible, in part because I think there's a lot of sloppy and quite reductive and essentialising work that is now being written that misreads these texts and uses them for rhetorical purposes only. Yet, at the same time, there's a half a leg remaining that constantly kicks me and says that's not sufficient. That seems to me to be a very wise thing. Since the world in which we live is constantly in motion and at times is being fundamentally transformed. This is especially crucial now because of one major recognition. As conditions change too many of us tend to assume that revolutions always go forward., Yet, one thing that is increasingly evident is that it is possible – and real – and is

exemplified in the growing hegemonic influence of movements of what we can call a 'conservative restoration' or conservative modernisation. This is something I am deeply committed to understanding – and to interrupting. I'm interested in how revolutions go backwards. Clearly, I've always been interested in differential power. But the ways in which this works under current neoliberal and neoconservative conditions requires that our theories and analyses become much more nuanced and subtle, not simply a return to rhetorical slogans. We need to show how the agency of dominant groups (again the plural is absolutely crucial) exercise agency. We need to see them as engaged in a very creative cultural, political, and economic project – basically involving a creative social pedagogic project of changing our common sense fundamentally. Because of this, in the last two decades, I have focused on the political Right. People like the person in Austria who has now won. I'm interested in the way in which rightist mobilisations occur and that requires that I think about identity, how masculinity works, how the use of the racialised 'other' plays a major role, the ways in which class understandings can be and are altered and mobilised. That's been the kind of trajectory I've been on. I'm now trying to figure out how did the Right do what it did and then use that understanding to learn what can be done to challenge them successfully.

All of this is because they have taken all of these dynamics and have pushed people in a direction that I think is murderous. All of these issues about agency, about people's identity, about the curriculum in schools, about social transformation, come together here. What I want to argue is – what I want to understand is – how to change these kinds of things, what can progressives learn from the people on the Right who have proven to be very good at it. In my mind, Gramsci was correct. Dominant groups work off of the elements of good sense. This needs our very best theories and actions.

**JANEZ KREK:** *It is obvious that right-wing neoliberal policies have introduced the most important political changes in the USA and many other countries in recent decades. From our perspective (Slovenia as a part of Yugoslavia until the beginning of the 1990s), another political rupture should be mentioned. From the 1980s to 1990s, Yugoslavia disintegrated, and the Eastern Block collapsed, China turned into an unprecedented mixture of the 'Left' Party'-rule supporting 'primary', neoliberal capitalism. Did these changes in political and social paradigm also mean a change in understanding of the 'conceptual position' of 'critical pedagogy' for you, especially in relation to Marxist theory as a source of political theory's vision and emancipation? Did these paradigmatic changes have some impact on your 'critical theory', a change of perspective on what is important in education?*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** This is a complicated issue. I mentioned that I've got two legs. I don't want to throw out Marxists' concerns. But I think that within the Marxists traditions there are analyses that are absolutely central to the work I want to think about. But there's not a single Marxist tradition. I think that it's a false claim to assume that there is. There are certain tensions and tendencies within Marxist traditions. There's been a resurgence of voices who sound like Second International Marxists, who simply (and wrongly I think) claim that it's all the economy all the time. There're others who look at intersections of the state with economic form and class dynamics. This seems wise to me – if we remember that class occurs in raced and gendered bodies and that these dynamics have relative autonomy. But I also want to claim the following: two class models are insufficient. That capitalism has been radically transformed and I think it is a magic trick to assume that we can use 19<sup>th</sup>-century models of class dynamics to fully understand today's national and international realities. We need class understandings powerfully – class has not gone away, but it has become much more complicated. So, I want to look at the intersections between the state, culture, and economy. And I want to look for instance at the ways in which certain class fractions, the professional managerial middle class, have actively colonised the sphere of educational policy within the state apparatus. That is required because I think we need to focus on the realities of audit cultures and measurement, on the prevailing disrespect for teachers, on the belief that everything must be seen as good or bad because of PISA scores. This cannot be understood as simply due to the ruling class and its overt interests. Of course, I think there, of course, are relations of these things to deep structures. And in order to see this, we have to say what's the engine that causes this? And I want the engine to be made more sophisticated. That requires that when we do the class analysis that we ask who are the classes in power in particular segments. And if I'm interested in education, it's not only economic capital and its needs. This is where Bourdieu becomes essential to me, I want to think about the intersections of cultural capital, economic capital and social capital.

Whenever we employ Bourdieu, however, we need to remember the limits of his analysis. Bourdieu is wrong when he makes capital into a thing and not a set of relations. Yet, his categories are handy metaphors to think about the way in which control and power work. I want to restore the dynamics, the complex motions, to Marxist's theory, I want to reassert neo-Marxism which asserts that culture and cultural struggles are crucial, that identity is crucial, and that these relations are best understood by seeing them as fully contradictory. As noted earlier, I also want to say that when you look at education policy in particular, that it is not simply a reflection of a two-class form. That there

are relatively autonomous class factions, the new middle class, in particular, that has extraordinarily powerful forms and content. So, in addition I'm making a criticism of traditional Marxist's theories. The Second International forms of Marxism that many people like McLaren and Giroux argue for are simply rhetorical. But even this is not enough. I want to ask another absolutely crucial question: is it all about class all the time? In the United States, for example, whatever we have – including my ability to do my work – is dependent on the history and current reality of capitalism as a racial project. The nation was built on Black enslaved bodies. There'd be no nation without slavery. What does this mean? Let's think about what's the ways in which modern political economies have their basis in the unpaid labour of enslaved people, on the genocide of indigenous peoples, on the unpaid labour of women at home and on farms, and on the exploitation of women's work in the paid work places that have been dependent on that exploitation and disrespect. Thus, I don't want to ignore the economy, but I want to think about what are the ways in which race operates? Because the US has an internal and external empire, and it always has. And the US has a long history of struggles over gender relations and inequalities and this must be considered in truly constitutive ways.

How is it for instance, that we are now more racially segregated in the United States in schools than ever before? That one of every four African American young men in my state is not in school but has been or is now in prison. That's not just class. I want us to think about what are the ways in which multiple dynamics intersect and work under what we call the political economy and cultural struggles. Thus, I think that the state is not just a capitalist state; it is a gendered state and a racial state. An example would be right now in my own state of Wisconsin – which is, by the way, historically the home of what is called 'American socialism' and is supposed to be the most progressive state, there's more money spent on prisons than on all of higher education combined. And 80% of the people in prison are Black young men and women or indigenous or Latino.

That's the demographic data. And it should lead us to ask the question of whether this is an accident, is that because of class? Part of it is, we have de-industrialised the urban and rural areas, the factories are closed so poor white working-class men and women are now employed as prison guards to guard poor Black young men and women. I want to look at what's the intersection here? Capital is shedding labour and then giving jobs that involve the repression and incarceration of Black men and women. To do that I have to expand my understanding of capital and I have to look at how do schools work in such a way that minoritised children are basically pushed out? Not kept in schools.



What's the curriculum doing? How would we change that? Because I am a critical activist in education, I want this to come back to schools; but, then again, I want to do it in a larger context. This also means I have to look at not just what is someone or some groups are doing and not just who's in charge, to highlight the agency not only of dominant groups, but just as importantly the agency of oppressed groups as well. This means focusing as well on who's doing the interruptions. Who's acting back? And that means I have to think not just about class and its supposed centrality in every situation, but, in this case, if you're talking about race and the social movements that have been formed that deeply challenge the racial state and its policies and practices.

It's groups of Black young men and women and parents and Latino and indigenous people saying, 'You can't do this to me anymore'. These movements extend beyond their class location. No matter where they work since many of them may be middle class – I have to ask about social mobilisations and social movements that are class based, and race based, and gendered/sexed based as well as ones that are complex in their composition. This also needs to include movements that have religious forms as their basis, as we shall see.

This focus on social movements is crucial not 'only' because it allows us to see the agentic work of oppressed people. It also allows us to much more fully understand the Right. I have to look at the Right. Since the Right is not just capital, it's conservative religious activists. It's anti-immigrant activists and while it's partly about class, it's not only about class. It's also about threatened white masculinity and white dominance. About the fear of the Other, it means I have to expand who the actors are. And that means I have to focus on – in the United States for instance – issues of racist behaviour now increasingly present in the larger society but also the ways in which ultra conservative religious forms and movements have been increasingly influential in schools and now in the state and the economy.

This, of course, is now truly international. How would I understand Pakistan, Israel and its miserable mistreatment of the Palestinians? How can I understand that the curriculum in many Texas schools now says the following: evolution didn't occur, and that global warming is a fiction? That's not simply a class discourse. How would I understand that in Texas teachers can get certified as science teachers of Physics and Biology and Chemistry not by teacher colleges, not by the University of Ljubljana and its excellent programmes and history? They're certified by the Institute for Creation Science which says that the Big Bang never occurred, that the Bible says that the world was created in 4004 B.C. and that there is no evolution whatsoever. And that there's no climate change. I now have to employ a considerably broader vision if I want to think

about schooling and politics of interruption. I want to say hmmm, who's doing the interruption now? What actually is the Right? How has it changed in both its composition and its strategies? And that requires that I add more lenses to see reality and that I think not just about structures around class and gender and race but about the ways which these dynamics are organised and by whom. This places social mobilisations and social movements that now have increasing power at the centre. These movements are more powerful on the Right, but they are certainly growing on the Left as well. I still keep my focus on the things that I thought were important before but now I have had to add some more. That's really complicated. But so is reality.

**JANEZ KREK:** *In your quite recent book *Can Education Change Society* (2013), and in other works, you use the terms *Left and Right*, terms that many now believe have less and less sense and a less clearly defined meaning. Let's leave aside what defines the Right. How would you define what – if anything – characterises the Left in our contemporary world? Does it (or how does it) still exist as a kind of political entity with a programme?*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** Remember I started out by saying don't ask for definitions, look at how the words are used and by whom. This becomes a good example: the Left is fractured for good reasons and bad reasons. But good reasons do exist, and it may be necessary that the Left has had internal fractures. If everything is determined by class, then it is all too easy to assume that women's issues and issues involving immigration get solved later after the revolution. I'm more than a little tired of people telling women, folks who are gay and lesbian, and people who are seen as institutional others: wait, we'll get to you later on! I think that's bad politics; I think that's very bad tactics. What I call the Right actually is willing to compromise among itself. And too much of the Left still has this vision of a search for purity. I think that the search for purity is actually a problem. It's a danger. I have this phrase as you know called 'decentred unities.' I want us to think about what binds us together but not under my or one single leadership. This must be the result of ongoing collective and participatory deliberations and agreements.

At the same time, I think that the Left has been subjected to internal divisions and drifts that are very damaging, but at times they were necessary. Again, let me give an example. Some of you know I've spent a lot of time in Korea, I was arrested in Korea and some of my friends who are quite radical were arrested with me. I was giving a talk like this and I, unfortunately, said something about military governments. In some ways that may not have been

smart. But on reflection, I would still do it. Think of Turkey now, that's what it felt like but worse. My friends who are very militant had a tendency to tell the important women's movement that had emerged in Korea that this would change after we change everything else. That really is disrespectful. And as I have repeatedly said here, it forgets that capitalism is also a gendered structure. It requires unpaid labour, domestic labour. -women, almost all women, have two jobs, paid and unpaid. Capitalism depends on the unpaid labour at home. Look at neoliberalism, an ideological form now increasingly dominant in the West, in Germany, France, England, in the old empires which are trying now to reassert themselves, and the United States. Neoliberals – that is, economically dominant groups and their allies – are saying the following: it's too expensive to have health care, care for the elderly, people with Alzheimer's, people working as youth workers in communities... we can't afford that now.

But all of this work still needs to be done and guess who does it. The unpaid labour of women at home. So, if your relative can't get health care, guess who's supposed to do it? It's women. In many ways I want to say that the Left disintegrated not simply because it was wrong, but because part of it was transformed by real progressive social movements that understood the structures and processes that were also fundamental to our societies and their relations of dominance and subordination – and it needed to be transformed. But this continuing transformation also created a great rift and fracturing. The reality of having multiple progressive projects is the reality now and is actually something that ultimately will strengthen progressive forces in the long run. The project for instance of transgendered people is very important, the issues of sexuality and the body are important. The Black Lives Matter movement in the United States is teaching all of us how to mobilise effectively against multiple relations of dominance. The issue is how do we see the inter-relations of these movements and struggles so that we can form alliances across our differences and work together for a more emancipatory critical democracy.

Here's another example of how to think in ways that show the connections of different dynamics and the importance of building alliance. Rima and I were working in South Africa, and we went to some schools, and there were few or even no teachers in many of them. One third of the teachers are gone. Why? Because they're dead. Why? Because big pharmaceutical industries from Germany, from the US, from Canada, from England, demanded profit for drugs. Yet, no-one has to die of an HIV infection. Zero. These teachers died because their salaries did not enable them to afford the prescriptions and the government and especially drug manufacturing companies refused to see that it had a responsibility for the health of these people. It became clear to Rima and me

that we needed to see intersections between the issues of the body and people being killed and profit motives. If I was interested in schools – and the fact that there's no teachers in many schools – issues of sexuality, of men's treatment of women and the spread of HIV infections, and the profits of large drug companies – all of this had to be combined. And movements around each of these needed to work together if this situation was to be transformed.

Thus, in many ways, I want to applaud those people that challenged the traditional Left – as long as they also showed respect for the gains that were made under what is traditionally been political economy and class analysis. And because I want to demand respect for all of the gains that were made, and that are still necessary, I want to use the word the Left out of respect for what formed me and because I think, as well, it is still absolutely essential. But almost every time I use that word – the Left – I put in mental quotation marks. Because to me the word 'Left' is now this sliding signifier. It has no real centre, and that's a good thing as well as the bad thing. I would usually now call the Left a larger 'progressive' (decentred) alliance that is committed to a broad range of emancipatory projects. But I have to be very cautious in using the word 'progressive' here in Slovenia, especially in this entire region. Because there are progressive parties in Austria and in Serbia and elsewhere where progressive means as retrogressive as you possibly can be. It can mean right-wing populism, a very dangerous phenomenon that I now need to talk about.

Rightist populist mobilisations are now present and increasingly powerful in multiple nations. So we're now searching for a word that describes this set of alliances where people are saying what Nancy Fraser says in *Unruly Practices*: there are three kinds of politics that are essential to anything that is progressive: a politics of redistribution (the traditional left), a politics of recognition (which is about respect and cultural forms and which also may require structural changes including economic, ones) and a politics of representation and voice. To me, it's putting those three together as progressive mobilisations that are important. Yet, we need to remember that the Right is equally complicated. It too has demands in each of these spheres. In books such as *Educating the Right Way* I document how the Right, not just the Left, has changed. the Right has changed. It, too, has incorporated 'populist' messages, forms, and attacks. Here again, I have been strongly influenced by Gramsci and his analyses that modern forms of dominance work through what might be called a hegemonic block and alliance, an 'umbrella' that multiple groups can coalesce under. I want to think about this as an umbrella.

Let's examine this. Most of us would agree that it's raining a lot in education, social welfare, the economy. Most people want to get out of the rain, but

there's a large number of ideological umbrellas out there. There's our umbrella: show respect, pay people enough to live on, stop exploitation, no more racism, colonialisms are a bad thing, women deserve equality, and many more. This sense is the same that Nancy Fraser has argued for. There's a politics of redistribution coupled with a politics in which the body and cultural forms and identities are central, and a politics of representation and voice. These are interwoven, and each is important to human flourishing.

The Right recognises that there's multiple umbrellas. If I want you to come under ours (the Right's), I have to convince you – what Althusser called interpellation – to do this. Yes, it's raining, so for parents it is raining, and there's no guarantee that their kids will do well as universities cost more and more outside of Slovenia, and it may be temporary in Slovenia that there's no big fees, because the rest of the world is moving towards fees in almost all institutions of education. Teachers would say it's raining because their pay is not being increased, they're losing their autonomy. Capital says it's raining in education – and I quote now – schools are like black holes, you pour in money and PISA scores don't come out. So, it's raining. Thus, the task is one of ideological convincing. The Rightist alliance engages in that vast social/pedagogic process of generating the discursive force to convince people to come out of the rain under its leadership. It is important, however, to understand that this leadership is not simply one group. The Right has four groups with their hands on this umbrella and they don't always agree with each other. One is neoliberals: private is good, public is bad, corporatise everything, shrink state funding for education and give it to the private sector. Our new secretary of education in the United States – a billionaire who is also a very conservative evangelical believes that we must fully support private schools, since supporting public schools as a state function is a bad idea. She also believes that her task is to 'bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth'.

Neoliberals like this secretary of education are committed to a weak state – everything should be as private as possible. This is a very dangerous position. We already know that the private school sector is more class and racially segregated than any other school system in our nation.

There's an influential second group that is committed to a strong state not the neoliberal supposedly weak state, what I call neoconservatives and they want control, state control, central control over culture, and over women's bodies in particular. They are anti-abortion, women shouldn't have rights whatsoever about their bodies and the processes of reproduction. They also have a strong cultural agenda, one that involves a romanticised and deeply ahistorical vision of a common culture and a common set of beliefs that all people must be

taught and share. This is what Bourdieu would call an act of symbolic violence.

There's a third group called authoritarian populists, a term that I draw from Stuart Hall. They believe that 'the people' should decide, but that there's good people and bad people. Good people believe in orthodox religious forms. And the more I can integrate religion back into schools and social policy, the better it will be. That group has the fastest growing school reform in the United States: home schooling. Three to five million children have been pulled out even out of religious schools, they are being schooled in the gated communities of the home, thereby guaranteeing that nothing but religious and very conservative values are taught and are never interfered with by the outside world. Because there's too much pollution outside of kids with different ethnicities, different cultures, different languages, different religious beliefs, we must act to keep the children safe. Thus, they never interact with anyone who thinks differently.

And then finally there's a fourth group in this alliance – the professional and managerial middle class who believe that if it moves in classrooms, measure it, and if it hasn't moved yet, measure it anyway in case it moves tomorrow. Pardon my humour in describing this group's beliefs in this way. But these are people who have actually colonised the educational apparatus of the state. And it's often their policies that are being instituted, not just capitalists. Their mobility and that of their children is based on the cultural capital that they possess, the cultural capital of measurement, accountability, technical expertise, and managerialism. From this we can see that the Right is also complicated. And that means that it is even more necessary to think about hegemonic blocks in which alliances are formed that involve a complex economic, political, and cultural politics and that cut across the landscape of class, gender and sexuality, race, and religion. Given the fact that I have worked not only with workers and anti-racist groups throughout world but socially critical religious groups as well, I don't think it's natural that people who are religious move to the Right. This movement toward the Right has taken an immense amount of effort by the Right to convince people to come out of the rain under the umbrella of what I call *Educating the 'Right' Way* conservative modernisation.

Because of this conservative umbrella, one that is fragile and constantly requires hard work to keep it intact, just like I put the concept of the Left in mental quotation marks, so too do I put the concept of the Right in mental quotation marks. This idea that these Right and Left alliances are fragile is crucial to my thinking about counter-hegemonic blocs. Take the issue of religious groups again. I have worked very closely with base – community movements in Brazil. These are very religious folks, many of whom are evangelicals. I quote from one

of them who said, 'Jesus was the first communist.' That's interesting.

Rima and I have also worked with Muslim activist women in Turkey, who when you look at them are often dressed in burqas, they wear gloves, their ankles are fully covered, many of them have hijabs, and some of them will have even their face covered. I'm ready to say I give up on you. Yet one woman came up to me when I was giving a very critically oriented address in Istanbul a few years ago, introducing herself as an 'Islamic Marxist feminist' and she is dressed in a way that – signifies to me that she is an Islamic religious conservative. Immediately I assume that I know what her position is going to be on so many things. And then she said to me: look, this is my safety net. It's not a women's problem – it's a men's problem. Islam is anti-capitalist by definition. She pulls out her Quran where it says: we will not charge for loans. 'I also am dressed like this because...' 'She pauses and then says: 'Look up above you, Michael, there's this objectification of women's bodies.' (I look above me on the street and there's a large sign advertising women in very sexually suggestive underwear and positions. It's a Victoria's Secret advertisement. It's like when you walk through the centre of the city here, and there're ads for Italian lingerie. So, she is objecting to that not because women don't get pleasure by looking nice but because they're saying that this representation of women is what is happening in our nation. Women's bodies, including now very young women and teen and preteen girls, are being used for profit. As she speaks, I too recognise this problem. I also see girls dressed like Madonna when they are 6 years old. It's true, it's happening in the United States. She wants to defend the idea not of women's purity but that we, women, will make decisions about how our bodies are used. And because men aggressively treat women as objects so much of the time, when she's in public, she says look, I'm tired of the fact that when I'm on a bus going to work I'm treated like I'm – I quote now – 'a piece of meat'. That's really powerful stuff. It contains very critical insights into women's lives and how women are publicly presented as objects of male desire in the service of profits. It seems to me that we must ask how insights such as these – elements of good sense in Gramsci's terms – can be employed to convince people that there are better, more socially emancipatory, umbrellas than those of the Right to be used to get out of the rain.

I don't quite know how to deal with that in terms of countering the Right's ability to occupy that space. But I want us to take that issue very seriously so that we can think in more substantive ways about how religious forms work and to ask if it is natural that her understanding of this gets organised around the ultra-conservative kinds of religious impulses. I don't think it is natural. Because I know many people who are deeply religious, the folks who

were arrested with me in Korea are evangelicals. They don't believe in evolution, but they also say, 'capitalism is not God's economy'. Even though it is one of the foundations of many conservative evangelicals that capitalism is indeed God's economy, for my friends from Korea they would have totally rejected this and would have quickly said that - Jesus would've told me to oppose it. I like that. That makes sense to me. This makes me realise that though Left and Right are still useful historical categories, because I want to respect the tradition of the political and ethical differences that lie at the heart of the categories of Left and Right. But they are mobile, not necessarily stable, distinctions. I use them out of respect for the people who were my teachers and for my own work but at the same time I also need to challenge the stereotypes of what counts as Left and Right and treat them as entities and affiliations that can be moved. The Right has moved a large number of people from the Left to the Right. It's clear that it's not a permanent condition. This is one of the reasons I urge scholars and activists in critical education to pay considerably more attention to things that go on outside as well inside schools. I say more about this and about what it tells us about our social responsibility to understand and interrupt dominance given the Right's creative ideological work in *Can Education Change Society*?

**JANEZ KREK:** *In the book Education and Power, you write that ideologies 'are embodied by our common-sense meanings and practices' (1982, p. 249). It is not, therefore, simply the case that the revelation of truth brings the elimination of ideological ties, or that people do not know what they are doing (the Marxist idea of 'false consciousness') ... the hardest form of the ideology is faith in common sense, a belief that we are doing what is required of us by 'reality' ... This means that effective anti-ideological intervention cannot be simply criticism alone; anti-ideological operation requires the next step, the establishment of 'hegemony' in the field of discourse, the occupation of the ideological space, which would mean occupying the place of 'common sense', what 'common sense' believes. But aren't these two positions contradictory? - And precisely for this reason, hasn't the Left perhaps always been better at criticism and worse at occupying of the place of 'common sense'? Where are the key points (globally or within the context of the United States) in which there is a need to reoccupy the place of 'common sense'?*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** This is among the most important questions that can be asked by anyone as it has to do with political practice. And cultural forms. So, let me repeat one thing. To me ideology is not something appearing in your brain, it's an embodiment. And that's pure Althusser. It's embodied in a way you sit, in the foods you eat, in the way you walk... So, when I gave the example of



the youth in my classroom resisting me by going to sharpen the pencil and then going back and then the slight smile between the two of them as they knew they had taken back some time, we can say that that act of resistance is counter-hegemonic but it's certainly not conscious. It's not saying: I'm going to show the way in which the capitalist hidden curriculum in schools can be interrupted. It's the daily life, it's I'm bored in school, this teacher is boring, I have to have some fun. That is common sense that embodies elements that interrupt dominance and reproduce it at the same time. So, it's not a conscious understanding, but it is again a similar situation described in Paul Willis's analysis of the working class 'lads' in *Learning to Labour*. It's not up here only in one's head, it's in the entire formation.

I start out there. And I want to employ the Gramscian and Althusserian insights in many ways here. As I mentioned earlier, there's no such thing as false consciousness. Consciousness is fully contradictory, and it's not an appropriate way of understanding consciousness to maintain that the idea's up here. I want to say it is the entire body. Not just the ideas we have. But for ease of communication we want to call it 'common sense', in part what Bourdieu has called habitus, but in a much more dynamic way than Bourdieu. It's the way we go about our world. An example would be something like this that I mentioned last night: There're many women in one of my postgraduate classes that meet at night. When it gets late at night and it's dark, many of them have to walk to the bus stop that's four or five blocks away. However, the university has dimmed the lights as you walk on those streets because the electric bill is now very expensive, and the university's budget has been cut. So, they save money by putting in lightbulbs that aren't very bright. When I walk on my way home after class I walk easily like this; it's my space and I do not have any concerns about my safety. Yet, for many of the women in my class, half of them at least, they take out their cell-phones and talk to people as they're walking or if the battery is dead, the phone is still held up to their ear as if they are having a conversation. This is done in recognition that there has been physical violence and sexual violence against women near the university. Unlike the women in my class, my body – the male body – in this space is privileged.

For the women in that space, the use of the cell phone is not necessarily done consciously: it's automatic. Because there's knowledge already in your body that a woman's body in that space is endangered. Even if it never happens, it is always possible. Thus, there's some sort of automatic response that is very powerful. If we think about that, I want to say there are elements in our limbic system; there are elements of good sense. It's a dangerous space, and automatically I do this. Only if someone asks 'Why are you doing that?' is it brought to

the level of overt consciousness. ‘Well, I just feel safer’. But embedded in that statement and in the very physical acts with the phone is a profound recognition that social space is fully gendered. It’s not the words that are used; it’s not conscious in the usual sense of that term; it’s not theorised. But their common sense has elements that recognise gender hierarchies and that the act of simply walking home requires caution.

I’m going to use this as a sort of a metaphor of what’s going on. It means that I have some faith in some elements of common sense. I do not romanticise it. But I think that it is crucial that we understand that common sense is contradictory – no one is simply stupid about their lives. Too much of traditional Marxist understanding of ideology is ‘You don’t get it’; ‘You don’t understand anything’. Somehow I get it, but you don’t. Once again, I’m not a romantic, I think people do have ideas and understandings that are fully wrong sometimes. Racist beliefs for example such as a belief that immigrants in the United States are stealing people’s jobs. There’s not one bit of evidence to show that’s true. None. But that’s the common sense that many white folks who voted for Trump have. But maintaining that there’re elements of good sense and bad sense in a tense relationship with each other involves me in trying to think about ideology as fractured, as having possibilities, that can interrupt dominance, and that there are partial interruptions already.

Thus, I don’t want to demonise common sense. I think that common sense is a place in which conflict goes on. The Right works at deconstructing a more liberal common sense. Think of my metaphor of the umbrella and rain in society. They’re saying it’s raining, so come over here. Immigrants are stealing your jobs and that the cause of your problems; Black people and poor people are getting something for nothing. And increasingly, they are making these arguments by drawing upon the language of fairness and justice that they steal from Black movements – and I quote: ‘White people are the new oppressed’. That’s Trump’s supporters. The fact that the Right can take progressive language and employ it to move people politically to come under their umbrella shows that populist understandings of the rights of ordinary people have contradictory possibilities. They can be mobilised to lead to genuinely emancipatory movements around fully participatory thick democracy or they can be used to create support for even more repressive movements and policies. So I’m going to say: wait a minute, common sense is a site of struggle. It’s not natural that the elements of bad sense dominate over the elements of good sense. That requires hard and creative ideological work to accomplish this. Everybody has some good sense about their lives. And because of that, I believe that it is possible then with hard and creative critical work to pull people from one political

space to another political space. The Right has been able to do that; why can't the Left? But we have to do that. Thus, one of the things I argue is that if you want to understand how to interrupt dominance, look at how common sense works as the site of struggle with elements that are good and bad and then study what the Right has done. They are very good at doing this – as we just saw in Austria or in Serbia or in Hungary or in Poland or right now in the United States. Certainly, my aim is to develop counter-hegemonic work which would interrupt dominance and to pull people away from the umbrella of conservative modernisation. In many ways, this is a critical pedagogic project. I'm not shy. I think there's work to be done not just in schools but elsewhere about convincing people to come this way not that way, to recognise that there are other umbrellas that provide real answers to real problems caused by that rain. In saying this, I am worried about whether this necessarily implies that I want myself and my allies to be hegemonic. I have enough faith in some post-structural arguments that there is a danger in a search for certainty that that can lead to damaging kinds of things. It can lead to the reintroduction of the Bolshevik solution which is based on a position that I want everyone to agree with me. If you don't agree with me, you're wrong – There's a very long and unfortunate history of this on the Left as you know from personal experience here. This is a form of masculinity as well. Honestly, I want us to be hegemonic, sort of. But by that I mean something like what has been built in Porto Alegre in Brazil where the state is a learner as well as a teacher and is strongly connected to a fully participatory set of structures that are constantly being reflected upon publicly and where decisions are based on a process of participatory budgeting and similar mechanisms. This is a very different vision of leadership and of creating a more critically democratic umbrella than the Right's authoritarian forms of 'fake' populism. Thus, I don't want to act like the Right. And I don't want to act like I'm always correct.

So, it seems to me that, yes, we must act and generate consent: that's the hegemonic process but, at the same time, this is an *ongoing* process. If it looks like I am now certain we have gotten there, then I think I am acting in a non-democratic way. I think critical democracy is an ongoing project with no end in sight. Because of that I want to say: yes, we want to be counter-hegemonic and then fully reflexively and self-critically hegemonic, we want people to be much more critically democratic. But words like democracy and criticism change over time as new social movements and the demands they rightly make challenge the oppressive conditions that they face. I want myself and everyone who arrogates the position to themselves as a critical teacher and a critical pedagogue to remember that teaching goes two ways. And if I'm not able to

be criticised by saying ‘Michael that’s nice, but who gave you power now?’, we should not act like the *maître d*’ in this restaurant. It’s not up to me to say: you sit here, you sit here, you sit here and there can never be another *maître d*’.

I think that in some of the postmodern and post-structural criticisms – but certainly this is not true of all of this scholarship – of any substantive exercise of leadership they have taken postmodern criticism of the power/knowledge nexus too far. Such postmodern criticism can be paralysing and the last thing we need is to be paralysed, to be filled with such a strong deconstructivist orientation that we are afraid to act because no matter what we do we are ultimately reproducing various forms of power. Yet within that very same literature is a profound understanding that power can be productive in more democratic ways as well. This is important to me. To me, democracy is a never-ending project. And if it ends with everybody agreeing with me that is really dangerous. So, I must put in mechanisms that guarantee or come close to guaranteeing that I and people like me can be criticised as well because otherwise this process stops. If it stopped decades ago, issues of sexuality would not be on the agenda.

I want to historicise this. What is necessary as new social formations and new forms of identity come up? I don’t necessarily always agree with all of them and I’ll argue about them. But at the same time these movements become my teachers about what kind of society and education is needed to keep the vast river of critical democracy flowing. To me what is common in any constructive counter-hegemonic project is the worry that we’re forming a common without ongoing voices and interruptions. And I want those voices and interruptions to be ongoing. That’s my vision of what it means to be critical and my vision of what it means to be democratic. I don’t want that hardened and reified. The danger is that the Right understands how to deal with this as well, as it takes the language we use to justify our actions – such as ‘democracy’ – and largely successfully works to change its meaning from full collective participation to simply individualised consumption practices. Unless we put in place certain things, the Right will colonise that space as well. Given a commitment to democracy as a never-ending process, it’s uncertain, you don’t know what the end is. People are uncomfortable with uncertainty.

The Right is really good at reoccupying that space. I’ll give one example of that in curriculum. When I wrote *Ideology and Curriculum*, I was brought in by activists to work with a group of oppressed Latinos and African Americans in a school system in Texas, and there are a number of very poor parts of the city. The oppressed communities correctly wanted accountability. In their attempt to get that they said: we want teachers only to teach what’s in the textbooks. We do not trust teachers. Most of the teachers are white; they don’t understand our

culture, and our kids are not doing well. But we can read the textbooks ourselves and know what is being taught. Then we can criticise what is being taught. But when the teachers shut the door to their classrooms, we don't know what they're doing. So, they wanted strict accountability and they wanted schools to show that they were teaching the curriculum that the communities approved. The schools responded by putting in place a standardised official textbook curriculum that limited teachers to teaching only what was in the books and that was based on strict test-based measurements of success or failure. So, the communities and educational activists thought they had won a significant victory. However, that supposed victory was soon turned into a loss as it was used to support an even closer linkage between teaching, an unresponsive standardised textbook-based and test-based curriculum, and ultimately more measurement of students, with the teaching having no real autonomy to actually build an environment and a curriculum that was responsive to students' and community's cultures and histories. The ultimate effect was that the poor kids of colour got labelled as even less intellectually able, as more and more testing was put in place. The victory got turned into a defeat. That's a lesson I want to take very seriously at the level of educational politics and practices.

**JANEZ KREK:** *We have to give room for questions. You have definitely raised a lot of possible questions. Does someone from the audience have a question?*

**STUDENT (ŽIVA):** *I have two questions. My name is Živa, I'm a student here. The first one may be a bit silly but – there's no silly questions, just silly answers – I know, I know, but I can't get it out of my head when you were talking about terms pedagogy and education, I couldn't help but to translate our faculty – we call it faculty of education in English but in Slovene you would translate to 'Faculty of Pedagogy' or 'Pedagogy Faculty'. Why is that?*

**JANEZ KREK:** *Well, actually this is not a question for Michael...*

**STUDENT (ŽIVA):** *I know, but is it a cultural thing, why do we translate it in English, because there's a word 'pedagoška' (pedagogy), so why aren't we using the word 'pedagogy'?*

**JANEZ KREK:** *Well, we could go into this briefly. I'm not old enough to know exactly why it was translated like that. Probably Pavel (Zgaga) might know.*

**PAVEL ZGAGA:** *In British English, I think even more than in American English,*

*pedagogy is more the practice –that would be the methods- pedagogy is being in class and teaching and working with kids and so on. While in Slovenian context ‘pedagogika’ is related to a German term ‘Pädagogik’. This word was used in the past by one of the philosophers, it was Immanuel Kant, you know probably his essay *Über Pädagogik* that has been translated into English as *On Education*. And with him ‘pädagogik’ is still understood in that way as in British English today. So, it is doing it. For example, here, on this side, we are philosophers, some anthropologists, some historians and so on and there, THEY are teachers. ‘You’ do ‘Pädagogik’, that is, ‘you’ are practitioners, but ‘we’ are philosophers and will tell what the truth is, what the background is, the roots. Later, in German context (which for known reasons strongly also influenced the Slovenian terminological tradition) ‘Pädagogik’ was understood as ‘Erziehungswissenschaft’, the science of education. This dichotomy has been strongly present in Slovenian ‘pedagogika’ and this was, maybe, the main reason why we were careful using this word, not to send the wrong signal. This faculty was renamed in 1991 from ‘Pedagoška akademija’, i.e., the ‘Teacher Academy’, to what it is now: ‘the Faculty of Education’ in English. In that period, initial teacher education changed from a two-year degree (what you call in American context an associate degree) to university (Bachelor) degree. Being ‘upgraded’ from a teacher training college (if using English) to a university faculty, the name had to relate to sciences of education. This was the main reason that there was such a trouble about renaming and to find a good name. For translation, we also looked around the world, to other universities, what kind of name they use in English and we figured out that this is 90 % ‘Faculty of Education’ or similar. So, this is what somebody who remembers the late ‘80s can tell you.*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** These are epistemological wars, so the names actually make a difference. We have a building that is next to where my office is at the University of Wisconsin called the Educational Sciences building. The word science in English has a particular sort of positivist meaning, while the general meaning of that concept in Europe refers to particular forms of rationality. Thus it’s a much broader concept. In the United States it largely refers to numbers and to a limited sense of ‘evidence’.

You asked me earlier on about critical pedagogical studies. I have purposely used the word ‘studies’, because it doesn’t exclude narratives, it doesn’t exclude history or philosophy, it doesn’t exclude action research and its complexities and contradictions. Just as importantly, it doesn’t exclude critical reflections on the world. So, in English, when we hear the words ‘faculty of educational sciences’, we say: what the hell is that? You’re limiting us to these

things that are just empirical in the narrowest sense. These are very different meanings. In this regional area, even with the criticisms made by people such as Habermas, 'sciences' is still a very broad term, but not in the United States. When I say critical educational studies, it's also an interruption, it's not just about pedagogy vs education it's also a reflection on a larger issue. It implies a claim that I and others are making. It's a way of saying: don't call me a scientist, because I'm not certain what you mean by it. You don't seem to mean ethnography and anthropological studies, and you don't mean history or philosophy. What you mean is testing and control groups and medical model research and only 'evidence-based practices' with an extremely limited view of what can count as evidence. These are political and ethical issues.

**STUDENT (ŽIVA):** *Thank you. My second question is directed more to you I guess. It is about of the future of education in the US with your new president Donald Trump [Apple: You just hurt me badly] I'm so sorry. I guess during campaign we've already seen from the media a change in the society and with the new ministry of education that wants to put more money to the private schools and take the money out of the public schools, where do you see the US education system going, what path is it walking on and where is it leading?*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** This is hard to predict. One of the things about Trump and his minions is that you can't predict what they will do next. But I think the tendencies are clear. We have a very small fraction of schools that are private. It's one of the smallest in the advanced industrial nations. And we have the smallest body of religious schools in most nations. In terms of school finance and the kinds of schools we have, there will be many more schools that are marketised, many things called charter schools, which are supposedly under state control but can be basically run by car dealerships or religious affiliations, mega churches. We'll have much more of that. There will be defunding. That has already started in the public sector. I'll give one example: the University of Wisconsin. When I first went there, the state paid 70 per cent of its cost; now it's down to 13 going down to 11 per cent next year. Trump is a true neo-liberal here. Any funding of the state, except if he and his corporate allies have economic benefit from it, will be cut. We'll see the destruction of many faculties and universities and that money being transferred to for-profit universities, to the corporate sector. We will see many more for-profit schools. We'll also see the destruction of teacher unions. That's occurring already. I've just written a study on the Koch brothers who are the third richest people in the United States; they're petro-billionaires, and they have decided now that they and their allies

have won the national election they will put money into the local, on the state and on the national level to guarantee that Rightist control extends to all levels of society, including the local level. They're going to spend millions of dollars on school board elections, people who make decisions about curriculum, about local taxes.

They have just won in one of the strongest union areas of my own state. We will see increasingly the loss of teacher unions. In my own state, the teacher union now has 40 per cent fewer people than it did three years ago. New legislation passed by the neoliberal and neoconservative state legislature has made it the law that unions now dissolve at the end of each year. There're no permanent unions. If you're a public service worker in a union, on December 31<sup>st</sup> your union dissolves. You must have a new election each year in which 50% plus one person of all members must vote to keep the union alive. If somebody's sick and they can't vote it doesn't count. If people don't vote, their vote counts as a no. Fifty per cent plus one person of all members must vote that the union is reconstituted. But you can't bargain, you can't get raises for instance more than the rate of inflation even if your salary's been historically low and this is occurring at the universities as well. We didn't have a raise for eight years. We will see more de-funding, more de-unionisation and we'll see major changes in the curriculum. The people who backed Trump are very, very conservative, not just neoliberals, but neoconservative and ultra-conservative religious advocates as well.

They will benefit neoliberals because Trump wants more testing and, oddly enough, more control. That means our real ministry of education will be Pearson and other for-profit corporate publishing and media companies. Pearson, for example, is a large multi-billion-dollar test preparation and textbook publisher. In the process, teachers will lose the right to form the curriculum; the curriculum will increasingly simply be purchased. That means that even though teachers will definitely need more nuanced and complex skills of curriculum building that are required for an increasingly diverse society, and where the textbooks can't respond to the many kinds of languages and cultures that teachers will face in schools, teachers will increasingly say: we don't have time to do that. And already teachers are tense and frightened because of the political pressures and the neoliberal and, neoconservative, authoritarian populist, and managerial demands constantly being placed on them. When I speak to teachers, they say 'I can't do that, I'm always looking over my shoulder.'

One of the major reasons for this situation is that we have performance pay for teachers now. If you are to get any federal money, much of your money is based on the test scores of your children in the classroom. There's already



pressure on teachers not to teach creatively but to focus only on these low-level tests. And since we test only in two subjects: mathematics and reading skills, not appreciation, not critical literacy, but only on a very limited set of words and skills, that means that increasingly teachers, especially if you're in poor schools, will have no time and will forget their own skills of building curriculum and building culturally responsive assessments, that make a difference in kids' lives. Instead, the only evidence that will be important will be the standardised tests that are often developed by and purchased from the same large corporations that now dominate curriculum and textbook markets. The result will ultimately be greater gaps in achievement by class and a more racially based achievement gap. At the same time, you have teachers too frightened to do anything about it. And no collective group that they can turn to. You'll see it as well in the process of teacher's certification. Right now, those people here who are in teacher education programmes at colleges and universities get a license that once they complete their intensive study of education enables them to teach. They get an official government document that says you're prepared as a teacher. And for many teachers in Slovenia you need a master's degree, a five-year programme. We too used to be five years. The Republicans and the legislators who are on the Right have said it's too long to become a teacher. Anybody can be a teacher. So let's have this commercialised. Let's turn over teacher's education to Pearson and other commercial companies and for-profit universities so that teacher education is placed on a competitive market with little regulation and no guarantee of quality. The idea of making a profit out of teacher education is also visible in the fact that now to be licensed most future teachers have to take a national test in content and teaching style and methods that is controlled and built by Pearson. And the cost of this for the future teacher is nine hundred dollars a year to obtain the material and to take the test. This makes it even harder for poor and working-class students – and for students of colour – to become teachers.

It is important to see how this produces very negative effects. Many poor students cannot afford to take a test since public universities are already very expensive. To go to Wisconsin to become a teacher, in my own school, is about 20,000 dollars a year, if you're from the state, meaning if you live in Wisconsin. If you live out of Wisconsin, it's 40-45,000 thousand dollars a year. This also has extremely negative effects on who becomes a teacher in other ways. Right now, because university fees are constantly rising, and because Trump and his allies at the national and state levels have made major cuts in the public-sector budget, we have almost no people of colour in the primary teacher education programme even when 50% of the students in our primary and secondary

schools are students of colour. That means that the people who have much more money and who come from more affluent families and who largely come from dominant cultural, economic, and ethnic groups can much more easily become teachers. Yet, many of them have very little experience living in the cities or in slums, and they tend to have very little experience with children who have different languages and cultures.

All of these things will have major effects over time. With Trump as president, he has also brought in with him some other dangerous people. He and his followers in many ministries in addition to education are strong supporters of virulent anti-immigrant positions. They are often committed to what we call popular eugenics, the racist belief that poor people, people of colour, and immigrants are genetically inferior, are violent, and are not deserving of public support. For many of these Trump supporters, white women should have more births. For them, the problem is that Black and brown people are too proliferative, that they have too many children. With this will come many other hidden things. These supporters don't believe in any form of birth control officially. They don't want women to have control over their bodies. And a number of the government officials appointed by Trump want to outlaw and jail women who have had abortions. Thus it should be evident that there're many other kinds of policies that aren't related to education officially, but will have damaging effects on the lives of young women outside of schools.

Inside of schools, Trump and his appointments to lead the Department of Education and other departments in the government at all levels are engaged in dismantling many important programmes that have been victories for women's movements and real women's lives. For example, throughout the United States, programmes have been built in secondary schools for teenage young women who have gotten pregnant, but they can stay in school. Thus, their lives and futures are not ruined. They can bring the baby with them. These programmes actually cut across class lines at times. Yet, these are being defunded and removed, as are programmes in sexuality education, in respect for gay, lesbian, and other marginalised students. The lives of women and marginalised students will be remarkably different inside and outside of education.

All of these policies are creating a disaster. When you destroy unions, it means teachers will not have a collective voice to speak back. And if you demonise immigrant and Black and brown communities as lazy, that they don't work hard and are undeserving – which is also a part of Trump's and the conservatives' underlying rhetoric – this too creates a situation where large portions of the American population begins to share these perceptions of 'the Others' as 'immoral', and not worthy of respect. This is exactly what is happening.

The situation is made even worse by the press and other media where Trump's voice is heard daily, and the voices of criticism and dissent will either be absent or will have to struggle to be heard. Thank you for a very interesting question, I am personally very worried right now. However, there are also very real reasons for hope. In my newest book, *The Struggle for Democracy in Education*, I describe a number of significant things that are happening in education that signify victories not only defeats.

**RIMA APPLE:** *You were talking about people who are going to teach different cultures, they will not stay very long because when they walk into the classroom, it is such a cultural shock to them, they last only two or three years. So, children are also hurt because they are constantly getting inexperienced teachers. And we're seeing that already in Wisconsin where the number of teachers who are resigning at the age of 25 or 28 is just astronomical.*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** You can see these trends that Rima is talking about in teacher education. There's something that I don't think it exists here called Teach for America. It's now international. There's also Teach for Chile, Teach for Argentina, Teach for China, Teach First in England, and similar things in many nations. It is based on the belief that state-supported teacher education is a failure. It says let's take it out of universities, there's no reason for university teacher education and, in fact, let us close colleges and departments of teacher education. And close entire faculties of education. That's over-all their agenda. Some of these programmes are officially not-for-profit; however, many of these private programmes are profit driven. In most of these programmes, your only preparation to become a teacher is a summer of teacher education, six weeks, and then you're placed in the most difficult classrooms in rural and usually urban areas. The hidden assumption underpinning the positions of some of their supporters is that you don't need much education in education itself to be a teacher. I quote from them: 'Anyone can teach.' In many places, if you have a university degree, you can get certified with no serious preparation at all. Just as importantly, you are given almost no background in foundational subjects such as the history, sociology, and philosophy of education. All you get are 'practical' subjects, and only six weeks of that. You then sign a contract that says that you will work in that school for two years. Many of the people will work in the schools for two years and then they go to law school or medical school or to work in the corporate sector, because it looks good on their resume. It's like a conversion strategy. And less than 40% of the people in Teach for America stay in teaching. Rima's point is actually very important. It takes teachers time

to mature and it takes years to develop who you are and the complex skills and values and knowledge that are required to be an excellent and responsive teacher. The assumption that you don't need history or sociology or philosophy goes with the disrespect that these programmes show to the complexities of doing substantive work in real schools. Why would you need anything that raises questions? Or learn about serious critical research? Or learn how to engage in researching education? The implications for PhD students in education are massive as well. Why would we need that in education, since part of our agenda is to close schools of education? This will mean the tragic loss of the important traditions of asking critical questions about the means and ends of education, about its role in society, about ethics, about all of the things that make education so much more than merely training. And you can hear it in the questions that future teachers increasingly think are the most important – and sometimes the only – questions to ask. How do I control these children? Give me more management skills. Why am I learning philosophy or sociology or history or psychology or psychoanalysis or any of these kinds of things that are foundational? Why would I need this? It is the destruction of intellectual life and I predict much more unemployment for people with PhDs in human sciences and in education. That is truly destructive because that leads to the loss of memory. Once it's gone, it's almost impossible to replace. In the process, some of the most important questions about education no longer are even asked.

**DARKO ŠTRAJN:** *What were you implying by referring to culture? I would say from Walter Benjamin on we have to speak of culture as a mass culture. There is, of course, this elite culture that Bourdieu talks about in his *La Distinction*. But, actually, the culture that I think that concerns teachers, schools, is mass culture. Recently – I mean in last two or three decades – this culture is being overflown by new media. And there is a lot of discussion of so-called new literacies. As one can see this, it is some sort of media illiteracy that probably helped the new Right to gain such a big social space. I know that you think about it. What is your idea about these so-called new literacies?*

**MICHAEL W. APPLE:** We have been through this before many times. Nothing we are facing in the United States is any more difficult from the fact that the US was basically South Africa with an apartheid system during my lifetime. If you look at a teacher's contract from 1923, that was standard in the United States, women teachers were paid \$75 a month, and men teachers were paid \$225 a month. Women's underwear was policed. The contract said you must wear two undergarments and it was the task of the principle to check on women's

underwear. This seems bizarre but that was the daily life of teachers. And we were a system based on racial divisions. Nothing we are facing is harder than that. I come from a family where family books in the 1950s – starting with what was called the Red Scare in the United States – were buried under the barns in my grandfather's chicken farm because we were so frightened that we would be arrested. Now those things come back, and the fact is that this is not a pendulum that is automatic, but we have been through this before.

And somehow, there have been constant mobilisations against these things. That's why I like the term from Raymond Williams of the Long Revolution. It took 20 to 30 years for the Right to make me feel really depressed... 20 or 30 years of hard work. There is an old saying that says it's 20 miles into the forest, it's 20 miles to get outside the forest. I am deeply committed to saying we have been through this before.

The latest book is a response exactly to your question about pessimism which is: can education change society? This book is meant as the first of the series of three volumes. It says: this is what we must do. What can we learn from the people for instance within Black and brown communities that faced murder and still do? You undoubtedly heard a decent amount of the news of young black men being shot in the United States. That's nothing new. But it is the case that we have had this before and the fact is that it will probably happen again, but we need to have the leadership from the people who have successfully countered this. And that means we must learn from places like Brazil, we talked a little bit about that, and other places that have faced this and countered it. And constantly do.

*Can Education Change Society* is part of my response. What are our tasks, what do we learn from previous iterations? Let's not romanticise it, and think this will be easy. But I am ultimately optimistic about that. In part, because I think of my own understanding of mass culture, by the way, which is a space of interruption as well as a space of commodification.

I think that the new literacy has become very interesting because I think they are forms of interruption and they are constantly being attempted to be commodified. So, let's take hip-hop. It starts as speaking back to dominance and is created from voices from the Black communities and even the way of dressing was a way of speaking back. So, if you've ever seen hip-hop, for young Black men pants in particular are often down to here, down well below the waist Welcome to my underwear! Do you know the history of how that started?

Since one in every four African American men in many parts of the United States were in prison and they were not allowed to have belts, the pants fell down to here and the hips kept them up. Young Black men in schools said

consciously: we will show solidarity, we will not wear belts. Our pants will go down because we must show that we understand what this society is like.

Now you can buy pants that are really wide over here and it's three hundred dollars; you can buy hip-hop pants. That contradiction, that constant struggle over what mass culture commodifies, what it makes for sale, the anti-oppressive bodily forms and musical forms that go with hip-hop music and gangsta rap carry these contradictory meanings and processes. The widest audience for gangsta rap, with its tendencies to call women 'hos' (whores) and things like that is white suburban affluent boys. What? That's very interesting. It is used by white suburban boys against this vision that they're supposedly well-mannered nice young men who accept the dominant norms of society. They're listening to hip hop and gangsta rap and their styles of dress embody complicated and contradictory appropriations of mass culture. They use it as well as a form of opposition to age oppression. We need to remember that there are complex processes of re-appropriation at work here.

This doesn't mean that I like it. In many ways, I think its re-appropriation by affluent white youth is a form in which we colonise the space of Black youth. Thus, at times I find it a very bad idea. I find it deeply offensive. But on the other hand, 'message sent is not always message received'. So, following after Benjamin and Adorno, there have been additional gains in our understanding of mass culture and lived culture. Although I am not in total agreement with all of his arguments which at times seem rather overstated to me, I certainly respect Benjamin. His work is very powerful even today, in large part because he opened that space for that conversation. But I would prefer to look to people like Stuart Hall and the next generation who have talked about that and to say these things are constantly in motion, there's a constant dialectic, of insurgent popular forms that then are colonised and occupied and commodified by powerful agents and processes, and then disarticulated from commodities and used in different ways again. And it's a constant process. Let's take hip-hop. It is now bought and sold for money and simultaneously used by various groups as a way of speaking back to power.

On the other hand, I know people in education who are very Gramscian around mathematics and science, who are saying we are not doing Black and other minoritised kids who are poor any favours if we don't teach them things that are on the test or are part of the dominant culture. Because we're guaranteeing they will be failures. So, in many cities in the United States curricula in science that draw upon hip-hop have been developed. They are often quite socially critical. That's really interesting. There's a danger here in appropriating what started out as a counter-hegemonic cultural form into school knowledge

of course, because it makes hip-hop safe and anything that's counter-hegemonic and gets into schools can be used as a way of only saying: well let me show you how poetry works using hip-hop, thereby eliminating its resistant history and meanings. Richard Johnson has a very significant essay called *What Are Cultural Studies Anyway?* He says there's a circle of cultural production that has three moments that you can interrupt. One is the moment of production: who produces it under what conditions? You can interrupt there. Right now, it's often rich (and often) white men controlling music companies, taking hip-hop and gangsta rap and producing it for profit. But there are now insurgent movements among Black street artists using new technologies to produce themselves and to make it available on the web, so it keeps its vision of 'we are not for sale for white profit'. The second moment is the process of distribution, the moment of distribution, may now be produced by insurgent voices. It is distributed through new technologies that have voluntary payment. It's crowd-sourcing in some ways. That's really interesting. That takes out the middle person and has a different relationship between the commodity and the audience. And there is a third moment, the moment of reception or consumption. This involves the way in which cultural form and content are actually used by people and interpreted in different ways. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay have a book *The Story of the Sony Walkman* – because no women were alive in Japan at that time I guess? (sorry for the joke) – but in which they show how this kind of process works even with the Sony Walkman. It was commodified but then you put it in your ear and can listen to revolutionary material and feminist and anti-racist music as well as mass cultural forms produced for profit and then you interpret it. This circle can be interrupted at multiple moments and is a source of freedom. The commodity also carries with it sources of possible resistance. That, by the way, is Foucault in some ways.

I think that this idea that all these kids are media illiterates is not necessarily the case or at least is overstated. But even if it is true, there're efforts to combat it as well that're being done for example in Belgrade as well by Dejan Ilic and Ana Kolaric on media literacy that can provide a model actually in this region of having youth look at films, look at media, look at commercials and deconstruct the dominant meanings. It's not easy or natural at this moment of reception of reading stuff in non-dominant ways. That's a space for pedagogic work. There are programmes in critical media literacy all over the world now that need to be put in conversation with each other. And Allan Luke's work on media literacy, what is called the new media literacy, has now become more influential. I think that these tendencies and approaches are very interesting. There's also a centre for computer game research at my own university where

the idea is if you want kids, including poor kids, to be critically literate, look at all the literacy work they're doing on gaming and other forms that we usually do not associate with literacy work. Another example of these kinds of things is popular fantasy games where girls are using that medium to make their own games where women have more powerful roles, ones that do not include violence against women's bodies.

So, there're really interesting actions that are going on, and I have some faith in that. I think that insurgent cultural formation is going on all the time, and one of the things I want to do in the new book is to point out where that is happening. This is the next agenda after all this deconstruction. Remember, when I said at the very beginning: I have two issues. How do we understand how power works for the production of dominance and subordination and how do you understand how to interrupt it? The next books, such as *The Struggle for Democracy in Education* that has just been published, will be on the limits and possibilities of that.

**JANEZ KREK:** *Dear professor Michael Apple, thank you for your answers and for being with us at the Faculty of Education University of Ljubljana.*<sup>2</sup>

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2 The interview has been authorised by M. W. Apple in January 2018.