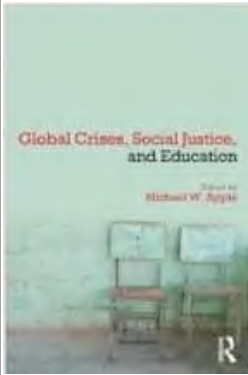


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| Global Crisis, Social Justice, and Education | | |
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| Author: | Michael W. Apple, (Editor) (2009) | |
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Global Crisis, Social Justice, and Education, edited by Michael W. Apple, is a compilation of chapters exploring the relationship between the forces of globalization and critical education reform and social justice around the world. At the heart of the crisis the authors collectively identify the forces the neoliberal capitalism as “A particular set of economic and social relations that privileges the market as the chief structural and ideological governance mechanism” (Apple 2009, p. 163). Within the structure of neoliberal capitalism, according to Apple, emerges a social order that establishes dominance by the privileged over subaltern group(s) or minorities. Education and the structure of the state itself serve to further perpetuate the dominance of the ruling elite by reconceptualizing the language of reform in order that the state may continue its cultural, economic, and political dominance over disadvantaged groups within civil society. In order to overcome the forces of globalization and neoliberal capitalism, Apple theorizes the need for massive social movements that are designed to combat issues of social justice (especially in the area of gender and education inequalities). Utilizing this theoretical approach, Apple includes three case studies that demonstrate the relationship between neoliberal capitalism, globalization, and grassroots social movements targeted at educational reform on behalf of subaltern groups. These areas include Japan, Israel/Palestine, rural Mexico, and the United States.

The focus of the Japanese struggle is centered on reform debates aimed at restructuring the post World War II Fundamental Law of Education. The forces of globalization (in the

form of U.S. occupation), established the FLE in order to promote a peaceful and equitable Japanese society. However, beginning in the 1990's conservative forces within the Japanese government began to seek reforms of the law claiming it abolished traditional Japanese history and gender relationships. Under the purview of reform and "traditional education", conservatives seized upon earlier reform efforts in the United Kingdom, which were also aimed at reversing the effects of neoliberalism and globalization. The Thatcher administration had enacted several reform measures aimed at reconceptualizing British history and creating a "back to basics" curriculum within the British education system. Japanese reformers appropriated the British model and utilized it to begin conservative reforms within the Japanese education system. Most notably, were reforms designed to reinterpret the history curriculum (in a more nationalistic format), and establishing a traditional view of gender relations within Japanese society. The central theoretical assumptions of this chapter are that the Japanese sought to model their system of education on a Westernized view and the Ministry of Education utilized the reform movements to further strengthen its power over the educational system. In examining the first assumption, Japanese education has often been touted by the U.S.A. and other nations as a model of efficiency and productivity. If, as the author claims, the Japanese system is modeled upon Westernized view of education why has the U.S.A. and other western European nations not experienced similar success especially within the area of math and science education? Surely this disparity cannot be wholly attributed solely to cultural differences between the nations. A cross-cultural examination between Japan and other westernized nations would most likely reveal striking differences which show the Japanese system is less Westernized than the author contends. Secondly, Apple contends the reform movement was merely a way for the Ministry of Education to further consolidate its power of the education system. As the forces of globalization (from outside the system) and the forces of neoliberal capitalism (within the system) forced the Ministry to relinquish much of its oversight and financial responsibilities vis a vis the local administrative units, the Ministry reconfigured itself to serve as an instrument of evaluation. Now the Ministry's chief obligation became administering and interpreting the results of high stakes standardized testing instruments. By so doing, the Ministry maintained its economic status as well as continued to be a means by which dominance was exercised over subaltern groups within Japanese society. The chief form of this dominance became the matriculation exams used by the Ministry of Education to grant access to higher education. Again the forces of the state appropriated reform measures and rearticulated those measures into a form that allowed the state to maintain cultural, economic, and educational inequalities.

In the case of Israel/Palestine, the chapter authors focus on two forms of inequality and power distributions within Jewish society. The first is the distinction between Ashkenazi (European Jews) and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern Jews) (Apple 120). European Jews played the central role in establishing the political, ideological, and religious foundations of the modern state of Israel. As such, this group also established the framework for the first Israeli system of public education. The aims of the system were twofold; to provide Jews with the historical and ideological founding of the nation of Israel and create workers

needed for a democratic Westernized society. Viewing the Mizrahi as inferior, the public education system tracked these students into vocational education, while providing Ashkenazi students with access to higher educational opportunities; focusing on the work of Antonio Gramsci and others, the author expounds upon the theory of hegemonic power and its function within the public education system to explain the marginalization of the Mizrahi. Through the establishment of private schools aimed at the education of Mizrahi students, parents and community activists attempted to address the inequality created by the state run public school system. The Kedma School was founded by parents and community leaders to provide Mizrahi students with access to higher educational opportunities. However, due to economic concerns the school was forced to become a semi-private institution under partial control of the Ministry of Education. While the Ministry dictated the teaching of official Jewish history and culture (Ashkenazi culture) the school continued to offer instruction in Mizrahi culture and history as well. While the Kedma School proved a successful example of social movements that countered the hegemonic control of the state, it was not reproduced on a large scale and therefore had little impact on the education system as a whole. The second distinction within Jewish society is that of Jew/Palestinian. Within this cultural struggle, Ashkenazi Jews have appropriated the language of Mizrahi reformers in order to create a united Jewish culture to oppose the “enemy other” as embodied by the Palestinians. Here the Palestinians have not become marginalized but excluded entirely from the public education debate. Again through the work of grassroots organizations (Hand-in-Hand foundation) and committed parents/activists, several semi-private multicultural schools of Jews and Palestinians have been created in several cities. However, similar to the Mizrahi schools mentioned above, these schools utilize Hebrew language, text, and continue to be under the purview of the Ministry of Education. As such, the overall impact again is minimal.

The final case study analysis presented by the authors is that of rural Mexico. Here the authors focus their attention on the efforts of grassroots popular education movements which exist throughout Latin America. The main goal of these social movements is to address issues of economic, gender, social and educational inequality, which has been created by transnational corporations and the passage of international trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This chapter utilizes the work of Paulo Freire. Freire advocated researchers/activists living among the peoples they were studying to gain a more complete understanding of the conditions the individuals encountered on a daily basis. From this understanding, educators/activists could create programs to address the real and practical needs of the individuals. The authors examine the work of two community-based educational programs; Centro de Educacion en Apoyo a la Produccion y al Medio Ambiente (CEP) and Ayuda Mutua. Both the CEP and Ayuda Mutua design programs to assist individuals (especially women) combat the effects of globalization and marginalization within their communities. Through the use of pedagogical fairs (CEP) and community activist training (Ayuda Mutua) individuals develop the organizational and content skills necessary to aid their communities. Pedagogical fairs, utilized by the CEP, address issues of sustainable agriculture, local production and gender equality issues. Ayuda Mutua’s focus is

centered on issues of community organizing and combating violence against women. Again each of these movements presents promising results for localized educational movements, but remains too small to judge if they will have any impact on larger issues of inequality throughout Mexican society.

Global Crisis, Social Justice, and Education presented an ambitious project devoted to studying power relationships and the system of inequalities that exist in cultures across the globe. While many of these issues were addressed, the work presents several concerns. Namely, the authors pay little attention to issues within the U.S. touching on briefly on issues such as school vouchers, and choice programs, which were voted down at the national level. Here again, they advocate the need for more community-based efforts to reform the inequalities that exist within the U.S. education system. Additionally, the impact of globalization on education in each of the areas is only briefly addressed. The authors focus their discussion almost exclusively on philosophical matters of state development and power relationships and largely exclude the practical impact on everyday schools. Furthermore, education from the author's perspective is centered on community-based social project designed to improve conditions of the community. Here again the authors miss what I consider a golden opportunity to examine cross-culturally the impact of globalization on local public schools and how they choose what knowledge to teach and to whom to teach it. A more concentrated focus on the public school systems in each of the nations examined would reveal more telling details regarding the development of curriculum and the forces which shape public education in foreign nations. Finally, given that the analysis of neoliberal capitalism and neoconservative movements is presented from a pronounced Marxist/neo-Marxist interpretation, the work reads as a sociological study of power relationships and oppression. Readers looking for a concerted work on education reform with concrete, accessible, and sustainable solutions for combating the effects of globalization and insuring educational equality for marginalized groups throughout the world might be somewhat disappointed—as I was.

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