

Can Education Change Society? by Michael W. Apple. Routledge: New York, 2012, pp. 190

Can education change society? *It depends*, says Michael Apple in his book title with the question mark. He suggests that such questions never have simple answers as these are not independent questions that can be answered without context. Questions should allow complex thinking to emerge. He suggests the need to think through questions like; who teaches? What is being taught? how it is taught and assessed? and subsequently how the knowledge learnt is being used and for what purpose, by whom?

The first four chapters of the book discuss the relevance of the scholarship of Paul Freire, George Counts and W.E.B. Du Bois and C.G. Woodson. These four scholars focused on the connection between education and political economy and radically challenged the legitimate knowledge space. The work of these scholars, says the author, allows us to look at the unwillingness of the economy to provide for the common good and its rootedness in domination and exploitation. Teachers and educators are not immune to social-political projects and neoliberal forces. We may be progressive with regard to one issue and very conservative with regard to another. They call for a socially and politically active school for the reconstruction of the society. The author also discusses the historical portraits of women teacher activists and gives examples of the counter-hegemonic schools established and taught by women leaders. There is a continuous assertion of imagining education to be personally and socially emancipatory and the need to see the connections between class and race. They have looked at the school a space to challenge euro-centrism and advocated the

goal of education to identify talent, grow curiosity and to promote social democracy. These scholars also focused on the role the teacher could potentially play in the desired transformation of society.

In the later four chapters, he tried to problematise social change and educational action. He describes the book as a personal account based on his 40 years of experience as a parent, public activist and a teacher. It illustrates his struggles to grapple with questions of social justice and democracy through education. In this part he weaves personal vignettes of political activism to demonstrate the significance of sustained and determined political action by regular people to bring about change in a democracy. He argues that it is not only the left and the progressive forces that have considered education as the key game changer but also the right-leaning individuals and organisations that have considered education as the key ideological site of control.

He asserts that becoming a critical scholar is a continuous process and suggests the following points with which education practitioners must engage.

1. Witness to the connections between education policy and practice to domination and exploitation.
2. Documentation of agentic possibilities and counter-hegemonic actions that must be done and exist.
3. Work closely with those engaged in challenging existing relations of unequal power.
4. Keep the multiple traditions of radical and progressive work alive.

5. Reconstruct forms of knowledge to serve the genuinely progressive needs of the society
6. Develop an alliance amongst education practitioners even if there are some differences
7. Develop media skills to communicate with a general audience
8. Help those who want to contribute to the cause

In conclusion, he acknowledges the fact that teachers are called upon to deal with the complexities arising out of the differences between interest groups and upcoming neoliberal forces, and national and international level class and race politics. Having said this he calls for the

urgent need of critically reflective teacher education which presently is under attack by neoliberal forces. He asked the questions and urges the reader to further think about questions; how long can these changes last and who is using education to change society, and in this way he announces rethinking on the relationship between education and society. The book is an insightful read for students and practitioners of education who struggle to bring about change in the system and seek action points in the messy, disillusioning space of education. The book is the form of a personal narrative with episodes and moods to enter and decipher. This makes the book a smooth yet passionate reading.