


Interview

Conservative alliance in Brazilian Education: revisiting *Educating the “right” way*: interview with Michael W. Apple


Alianza conservadora en la educación brasileña: revisitando el libro *Educando a la Derecha*: entrevista con Michael W. Apple

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Introduction

In 2021, the first edition of ‘Educating the ‘right’ way’ in the United States had its 20th anniversary. The book was translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil in 2003. Something that is worth pointing out is that, in the preface to the Brazilian edition, its authors state that “after a while, it became clear that there was no need for ‘contextualizing’ notes for a Brazilian reader” (Apple, 2003, p. XVI). It was obvious, after all, that several of Michael Apple’s arguments and concepts regarding the United States actually had a global range, as well as a considerable similarity to the Brazilian educational policy.

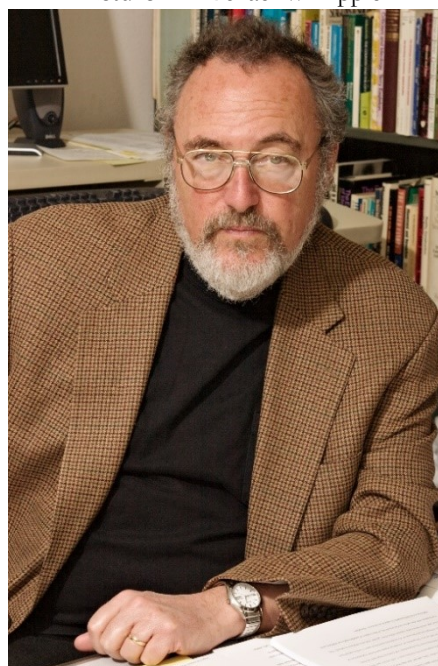
When we revisit the book’s arguments, in 2022, we realize that the conservative advance we are living in Brazilian education – the phenomenon many Brazilian authors are calling a “conservative wave” (i.e. Miguel, 2016; Piaia, 2019) – can be more precisely explained by Apple’s discussions and categories in “Educating the ‘right’ way”. In the last decade and even more today, we argue, Apple’s book makes even more sense than when it was first published. The fact that multiple Brazilian researchers (Dantas, 2018; Gandin & Hypolito, 2003; Lima & Hypolito, 2019) have been making use of this work to analyze the present conservative movements, allow us to claim that “Educating the ‘right’ way” is now a classic in the education field.

Taking into account the currentness of this work and the decades-long dialogue that Michael Apple have been keeping with Brazilian educators, activists and researchers, we have invited him to revisit his central arguments in “Educating the ‘right’ way”, considering, more specifically, contemporary conservatism in Brazilian education. In this interview, Apple revisits the concept of conservative alliance, examines the groups that currently form this alliance and explores the concept of neoconservatism, which has been widely mobilized in Brazilian research (Corsetti, 2019; Lacerda, 2019; Lima & Hypolito, 2019; Santos, 2020). In the interview, Michael Apple helps us to think and analyze the social context in which we are involved and, as usual, invites us to use a relational approach in education, one that connects economy, policy and culture. By offering an analysis that does not simplify the issues at hand, he provides us with powerful tools for constructing a complex analysis of conservatism in education.

Question: In the book *Educating the Right Way* [*Educando à Direita, Editora Cortez*], published in 2001, considering the US context, you present an alliance of 4 groups called the New Right: Neoliberals, Neoconservatives, Authoritarian Populists and the Professional New Middle Class. After 20 years of its first publication, how do you analyze this alliance today? Have these 4 groups changed? Do they still influence US educational policy in the same way?

Michael W. Apple: First of all, we want to remember that those are ideal types. By that you know they are not pure. The borders are fluid. There are often alliances being made and also they have in fact changed quite powerfully. So, we want to remember that the edition of *Educating the Right Way* that was translated to Portuguese in Brazil was the first edition. The second edition has about a hundred more pages, in which much more time is spent on what is called not only Neoconservatism but what might be called the New Conservatism and also on the ways in which Authoritarian Populists have grown in power, especially in educational

Picture 1 - Michael W. Apple



Source: Personal file.

debates. And they are extraordinarily powerful right now in the United States. As an example, many people who are part of our education governance system, which we call elected school boards, are resigning in part because there's been violence at school board meetings. There have been threats against their lives. And it is very difficult to be in education right now because religious activists and ultra-conservative people, who are a cross between authoritarian populists and traditional patriarchal and racist conservatives, are now demanding that hundreds of books be removed from school libraries. In the state of Wisconsin, as an example, the legislature is probably going to pass a bill that will refuse teachers the right to use terms such as systemic racism, racial prejudice, etc.

I give this as an example to say that from the time of 2001 to 2006, when the second edition [of *Educating the Right Way*] was published, there were already massive changes. There's been an attempted coup in the United States, there has been a claim that teachers are communists and Marxists and there's been a defense of ultra-traditional religious forms. And this cuts across religious affiliations, that is, conservative orthodox Jews, some conservative and orthodox Muslims, a huge portion of conservative and orthodox Christians. These are very similar to the Christian mobilizations that you have in Brazil right now. In fact, as you know, these groups are funded by the United States. If you did a Stephen Ball analysis of the networks, as you, Iana, showed in her own work on networks, you'll find that the networks are very, very clear, they're not hidden. All of that is to say that, just as capital is constantly transforming and now finance capitalism is in leadership by and large internationally as opposed to industrial capital, similar things are going on in these alliances and in the ideological forms that are being mobilized. There's also the loss of significant parts of the intellectual currents that made neoconservatism powerful. Neoconservatism was in many ways an intellectual movement, as well as a political movement, that defended the "western tradition." It said we must return to Rome and especially the Greeks since that's where true democracy was first tried. Those more traditional conservatives, many of them are at universities and think tanks, have lost power. The groups that have gained power are now right-wing authoritarians of a different kind, anti-gay, anti-woman, very religious, and utterly racist.

Now that means that when we're trying to think about these things, we have to remember that it takes hard ideological work or hegemonic blocks to be formed. So as Luís Armando Gandin and I show in *The Struggle for Democracy and Education* (published in Brazil in 2020 as *A Luta pela Democracia na Educação, Editora Vozes*), in the chapter on Porto Alegre, the Citizen School, and participatory budgeting and not conservative religious forms, but progressive religious forms, these help to carve the space open for much more progressive educational forms. That is also partly the case historically in the United States.

Interestingly enough, now those same people in *favelas*, who might have been influenced by particular kinds of Christian Liberation Theology in the past, have been what Althusser would call interpellated, creatively pulled under the leadership of rightist groups. This has not always been easy. It means that the right has had to work very, very hard, creatively. They paradoxically look partly Freirean in some of their social pedagogic moves, but in an ultra-rightist way, by listening carefully (and at times quite cynically) to people's worries. They are really talented and creative, about using people's feelings (that they are not being listened to, that schools are not helping their children). And it's not only schools and teachers who are to blame, but also the economy. We must "set it free." It's uncaring, selfish, elitist groups who don't care.

The Right has redoubled their efforts to pull under their umbrella groups of people that were first mobilized under the political coalition that was formed around PT. Many of these groups move somewhere. They move to cynicism, they move to worries about their futures, about what is happening to religion and "traditional morality," and they move at the same time to the right.

So, there's a creative social pedagogy that's gone on. Now, that means, and this is directly related to question one, that in order for me to understand what is wrong with, or what are the limits of, my original understanding of this hegemonic block, I have to look at who's under the umbrella now and how did they get there, because one of the grave dangers, and this is true of all my books, is that my books are statements of a particular moment in my understanding, where I am still being taught, by the four of you, and many others. When they are translated in for use in Brazil, it sometimes means that I have not been taught sufficiently yet. It means that at times I'm not quite ready to write yet about what is going on in Brazil, and then it risks becoming paradoxically a bit of an imperial agenda. So, when I speak in Brazil and elsewhere, as many of you know, I ask people to teach me. It is crucial that I understand what is going on in Brazil so that my analysis can be more fruitful, not just for people in Brazil, but for me and the people in the United States. Thus, the north needs to be taught by the south constantly.

In the US and Brazil, as well as in other nations, the four groups have changed, especially the power of authoritarian populism. One other thing is that many parts of the new middle class have also been convinced so that, by and large, some members of it support people like Bolsonaro. This is important. It is not simply that it is poor people and people in *favelas* that have moved to the right. If you can create a vision that the world is in crisis and schools are falling apart, then it's a little easier for many people who are worried about inflation, etc, but are within the middle class, to be mobilized.

Question: The neoconservatives were presented in your book as an important group within the alliance, but in your analysis the neoliberals were the most influential group. Do you consider that this is still the case or are there new configurations with these alliances?

Michael W. Apple: Neo-liberals are the dominant faction within both finance and industrial capital. Now, it is crucial that we remember, even though I engage in a form of critical cultural and ideological analyses, that I've been influenced very strongly by Antonio Gramsci and his arguments about wars of position. So, part of my argument about the nature of the alliance is the ongoing struggles over common sense, struggles over the body, struggles over epistemologies, struggles over memory, and knowledge.

Gramsci makes a distinction between wars of maneuver and wars of position. Wars of maneuver are frontal assaults, so, if you have a machine gun and I have a machine gun, we both start shooting at each other and who's ever left alive, with the most people with machine guns, wins. That is represented in traditional marxist theory that says that economically dominant groups have a hell of a lot more machine guns, and they use them. This position usually assumes that, when the working class becomes increasingly in misery, when it becomes even more tragic than it is now, it will somehow automatically get true consciousness.

This also assumes that the formation of "true consciousness is not automatic. We need a strong party to be the teacher. That's the Chinese model. It was supposedly the model of the soviet era. This position assumes what's called automaticity, that is, it happens automatically as long as there's the group in power that are economical dominant. Now that forgets about the fact that even in Russia and China it took a century for people's consciousness to get to the point where they said enough is enough. But many, many people also recognize that that's not a free-floating idea about enough is enough. The left is not the only group acting on this to deny consciousness, to change consciousness. Gramsci says in a war position that everything and every site counts: consciousness, family, schools, health care, the disgraceful rates of people, black people in Brazil and the United States, in prison, all of that counts.

So, a war position says every place where people live needs to be struggled over if we are to win the war over consciousness. It's a vision of what I call, following André Gorz non-reformist reforms (this is discussed in greater detail in my books *Can Education Change Society?* and *The Struggle for Democracy in Education: Lessons from Social Realities*.) There are a million things that have to get done. We must do the things that open the next door, so that they're not simple reformism, because, otherwise, the traditional war of maneuver vision is paralyzing, it's the economy all the time. If I can't change the economy and I'm in education, there's nothing I can do. It's the worst possible tradition in terms of acting back. I used to work in factories, I don't anymore. I used to be a printer. I'm not a printer, a working-class machine worker, anymore. Does that mean there's nothing I can do?

A counter-hegemonic strategy means that we have to not limit our analyses and actions to the economy. We have to ask in what sphere now do these various groups operate. Neoliberals are extraordinarily powerful in the economy. And they have focused their ideological project on many areas: in *favelas*, in middle and working class groups in Brazil, in slums in the United States and also within many middle class areas there as well. They have said the economy is destroying your life, your child will have no future So, we must convince you to vote ultra right. We will mobilize all the media, we'll mobilize attacks on schools, we will mobilize attacks on Dilma, we'll mobilize attacks on Lula, and we will use the state as a violent apparatus to make certain that you either mobilize for us or you're in jail, or you lose your jobs. That's a key part of this strategy.

Notice what sphere we are talking about. It is a crucial aspect of what Gramsci called wars of position as well as wars of maneuver. It recognizes the crucial role of the cultural sphere, and the ideological sphere. In recognizing this, the neoliberals are not stupid, they are very powerful. TV Globo, as an example, plays a large role in Brazil. Fox News and its equivalent in Brazil and elsewhere, and chat rooms, all kinds of media... All of these are important sites. So, neoliberals act in all the spheres. But let us also remember that they're not necessarily dominant in all the spheres. Thus, if we were to talk about religious forms now, which are extraordinarily powerful in Brazil historically, we would see that they were and are sometimes progressive, but not so progressive now. Or if we were to examine in the United States or in Hungary and Poland now, there is this odd combination of neoliberalism in the economy that responds to a sentiment that wants a "good" economy as defined by dominant groups and a resurgent conservatism in religious forms. As Viktor Orbán says in Hungary, we want this to be "illiberal democracy," (that's a quote), meaning we want you to remember that it's a conservative Christian nation. He has now formed an umbrella in which religious activists are now increasingly powerful.

In the United States as well, there are all kinds of movements that have been growing that are now very powerful, of fundamentalist Christians, saying we must get rid of gay books, feminist books, anti-racist books in schools and libraries, and we must control teachers lives. You have your own version of this, one that Fernando Penna has written about it quite eloquently in the volume *Disrupting Hate in Education: Teacher Activists, Democracy, and Global Pedagogies of Interruption* edited by Rita Verma and me. He focuses on rightist policies such as *Escola sem Partido* (Schools without Parties), which means don't tell the truth about anything or you're in trouble. It's a little more complicated than that, but basically that's the vision.

Now, that's not totally a neoliberal agenda but it is closely connected to and influenced by it, because they're also demanding things about limiting what counts as useful knowledge to be taught. The question that guides so much of this agenda is "why are you teaching all this stuff around topics that have no economic uses and destroy the family"? Why are you teaching anti-racism? What is this stuff on gay and lesbians and trans folks? We need jobs for our kids, so teach things that will get them jobs. At the same time, in the US and so many other countries, local,

regional and national legislators are cutting the budgets, and closing departments of humanities. They are closing schools of education or privatizing all of teacher education. These examples document that, in particular spheres, neoliberals are leaders. They've got more power than others, but in schools they share power, powerfully so, with authoritarian populists. An odd coalition is being built that combines rightist populism with neoliberal and privatizing forces. Thus, neoliberals are anti-union and that means that teachers are threatened by all kinds of things, lower pay, loss of jobs, and it's much harder to mobilize. Neoliberalism is not accepted by teachers, but it is increasingly hard to fight against the rightist authoritarian religious movements in their attacks on schools and teachers given the fear of reprisals and the loss of teachers' collective power.

Let me give an example from Wisconsin. Neoliberals have done a number of things here are now spreading throughout the country. In Wisconsin, for instance, each public workers' union, and teachers' unions are among the largest, dissolve on December 31st of every year. Thus, if you've got fifty thousand teachers in the union, they don't have a union at the end of the year. The teachers must vote again to form the union, and it must be fifty percent plus one voting in favor of a union. This is fifty percent plus one of *all the members*, not all the members who vote. So, if you're in the hospital with covid, you can't vote for the union. If your children are sick and if you don't have childcare, and don't have the time to vote, your inability to vote counts as a vote against the union. Now, that creates something that makes it very hard for teachers to stick up for themselves and to fight back against, not just neoliberal privatization of education, but also against the attacks on textbooks, schools without parties, etc. In this way, you can think of neo-liberals as setting the outline, the borders, and each of the other groups are extraordinarily powerful within these borders.

Question: you mentioned Globo or Fox News, for example, but I was thinking about social media and how the impact of social media has changed, especially when we talk about this hegemonic block. Maybe this is related to your answer to the first question, about how the conservative alliance has changed because authoritarian groups seem to be more powerful than the more traditional intellectual neoconservatives. So, can you say more about these groups' discourses in social media?

Michael W. Apple: Dominant economic groups set the borders. So, let's take Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok. I find it fascinating and distressing, and sometimes liberating, all at the same moment! That model of the individual display has psychological effects, so someone will say things that are incredibly homophobic or sexist or racist on the media. They feel protected. Many more people are listening, but there's this sort of ideological psychology, this vision of the neoliberal identity, the individual as free to do anything (and it's a good deal of the Covid vaccination rejection). For them, "I'm free", I reject government health intervention because the state is authoritarian, it cannot control my body. So, it's about the politics of body and voice. That, then, increases the power of neoliberal identities: the individual is superior to the group. Paradoxically it increases the power of the collective by forming new collectives. You become paradoxically a member of an invisible group that's now increasingly visible.

Capital here provides a space for this paradox of two kinds of identities that are often at war with each other, in neoliberalism: individuation, possessive individual, my voice must be heard, I feel controlled, and the people are controlling me. For such a person, trans folks are women who don't know their place anymore, leaving me - God help me - to sometimes do homework, do domestic labor; the loss of my masculinity; black people are taking over the public sphere. We can see this played out in many sites. At the same time, it offers, bizarrely, a solution to over individualization, but it's right-wing folks, right-wing collectivities, who are mobilizing around all of these individuals who are not feeling powerful: It provides to space for people to say, "I'm not

alone in saying racist things.” Thus, it is oddly enough a solution to neo-liberal identity, and a substitution of things such as extremist rightist and even neo-Nazi identities. And I'm not certain that I want to say that's an overstatement. The really far right is in leadership in all too many places quite powerfully right now.

Question: Considering what you wrote in your book, could you explain a little bit more who are the conservatives? Or maybe today we must ask two questions: who were the conservatives, and are they still the same? What are the specific attributes of the neoconservatives?

Michael W. Apple: It's interesting that the history of neo-conservatism in the United States is in many ways also the history of the left, not only the right. Many neo-conservatives were former Trotskyists, and that may be true for some in Brazil, as well. Their vision was quite contradictory and very complicated. It was based on a belief that we must restore the western tradition, we are the teachers of the world, and that's traced back again to where does individualism come from? For them, it comes from Greece, on its way to John Locke in England, and then imported into the constitution of the United States that guarantees individual rights. Clearly there's very real flaws and omissions in such a belief. For these people. That is, women were never guaranteed rights, and black people were counted as three-fifths of human beings, they were seen almost as animals.

This position can be seen in parts of the founding documents and traditions in the United States. It is a nation built on a foundation of enslavement, of removal of indigenous people, of a loss of memory of large-scale cultural and physical deaths and of the labor of millions of people. Yet for these neoconservative people, we are the home of democracy in the world, we are the teachers of the world. Speaking honestly, it is an imperial project of the West and the North. Raewyn Connell's discussion of Southern Theory becomes very useful here. Even though the neoconservatives have decreasing power in this alliance, this cross between conservatism and authoritarian populism has now partly merged. Those borders are now much more fluid than they ever were, and for many people there is a sense of: “Why should I feel guilty? I didn't own slaves. I'm not racist.” As soon as I hear somebody say that I say, “We need to talk right now”. Or they say, “I'm not sexist, but...”. Oh, really? Once again, interrupting this is crucial. It's not always a good pedagogy to say “whoa!” but something has to be done.

Right now, what we're seeing is many of the ideological forms and arguments are now being sutured together with worries about guilt, worries about people feeling like the tradition that gave them power, that gives them the right to say you can't treat me that way, is now being destroyed. Increasingly, in many nations and areas, for these groups, white people and conservative Christians are now the “new oppressed.” It's basically in some ways the story of *Escola sem Partido* (Schools without party), which is a similar kind of mobilization and movement. The groups making these claims support teaching only “neutral facts.” For them, that's the “real” history. They see the powerful arguments about making the curriculum and the values more critically democratic and honest as merely ideological and as an unjustified imposition, with no understanding that the current official knowledge erases the lives, cultures, and experiences of immense parts of Brazil, the US, and elsewhere. They ask why are these Afro-Brazilians in Recife, Salvador and elsewhere in the north (and many of them in Porto Alegre) saying this? Don't they understand that while we have flaws, we are still the owners of the nation's and the West's real history and real traditions? It's simply a problem with some bad people, not systemic racism, or the structures of patriarchal authority. You are just causing troubles and engaging in identity politics.

This embodies some of the intellectual roots of the neoconservative agenda, but it is now a much broader and a much more politicized movement and agenda, one that is more influenced by rightist populism and less connected to its original academic and intellectual roots. While the

neoconservatives have less power in this movement, the ideological moments, issues, and commitments are now increasing. So, who's taken their place? It is this weird combination of residual element of neoconservatism in combination with a more aggressive form of new conservatism, which is much more authoritarian than it's ever been, more pro-military, more willing to take risks, and to say the unsavable and do the undoable. It is joined by political groups and increasingly elected representatives in Brazil's Congress or in the US Congress, who are so frightened now of the mobilizations that are going on by this odd coalition, that they have now joined this complicated but dynamic movement.

Part of the new middle class now joins by saying nothing against the rightist populist impulses. This is where the absent presence becomes crucial. Saying and doing nothing to criticize or to act back in organized ways against the conservative populist combination has very real effects. People now are willing to entertain the possibility of a military coup in the United States. Yet recently the newspapers' investigative reporters have just shown that there was a plan to subvert the legitimate government in the US. They've got it on paper. It was presented to the person I shall only name once, Donald Trump. So, here again we have the absence of action being influential. Why would the new middle class shut up? Why would many members of it stay silent about all of this? It's still beyond me how.

Depending on which polls you read in Brazil, as many as forty percent of people will still vote for Bolsonaro. That may be too high, it may even be too low, since many authoritarian populists, and others, especially people on the border between middle class and working class, who are afraid of downward mobility will not answer to polls correctly. That's how Donald Trump got in; people lied. They said to polls that they would never vote for Trump and then they voted for Trump. Thus, once more the absence of action is an action. It's justified by fear, but it's also justified by the changes in commonsense brought about by the neoliberal agendas, by worries about one's children, and by the elements of good sense that are mobilized by this odd alliance now of authoritarian populists and new conservatives. It's difficult to find one word to describe what is happening. It cannot be understood by the concept of "neoconservative." But it is certainly a new form of conservatism. To this we need to always add elements of neoliberalism's successful pedagogic work in changing our understanding of democracy from more collective forms to what is best thought of as possessive individualism. Given this success, neoliberal agendas are more powerful in certain parts of daily life. But let's remember that in other parts, it's just fear.

Question: I think that's important to clarify the question for you because sometimes people say that there are a lot of neoconservative movements in Brazil, and we don't know that this is the best way of characterizing it, because it's something that was developed in the US context, it was an intellectual movement in the beginning, and then a political movement after, and maybe in Brazil it's different. So, this is the rationale behind the question; to clarify this idea.

Michael W. Apple: Okay. I agree totally with you again. As I noted, in the US it was largely a university-based and right-wing, think-tank-based movement. It was an anti-communist movement, but it was an anti-communist intellectual movement, not just a political one. Many of the people were in Philosophy and in History and in Economics. That tradition moved to other areas and traditions and a more influential politics. It was and is now used to justify Chicago School Economics, which did have immense power in Chile and Argentina, and certainly in Brazil, and is part of that movement. It's committed to a very narrow understanding of "freedom," one that is grounded in Austrian School Economics. For them, we must guarantee freedom. But what is freedom? The right to contract, the right to be an entrepreneur. Privatization. An epistemological war against substantive collective ethical norms. But while it was profoundly an intellectual

movement, it was still strongly influential. This ideological and intellectual tradition is imported and sponsored by think-tanks and other influential groups, and they are often funded by organizations from outside a country's borders.

For many of these think tanks in Brazil you can, again, often trace a good deal of the money from US groups, and that's very important for us to understand. However, we need to be very careful not to reduce what is happening in Brazil as simply a reflection of imported political, economic, and ideological movements and traditions. Brazil has its own histories of course. Its current reality and historical set of experiences cannot be fully understood by simply taking categories and theories developed from the outside. To take some examples, there is a myth that Brazil is not a systematically racist nation, yet it was the last nation in the west to outlaw slavery. Afro-Brazilian struggles to have this history and their current reality recognized and dealt with are constantly and correctly challenging the commonsense of all too many people in Brazil. Yet because of this myth, the racializing structures and ideologies that pervade Brazil are similar to but not always the same as in, for example, the US.

It is also very clearly quite sexist, in extraordinary ways, which makes it no different than many other nations, as well. But this is articulated in very complex ways to other dynamics that are also unique to Brazil's dynamics of masculinity and sexuality. At the same time, its class structure is historically and currently very complex, partly less industrial, and more historically "peasant" based in certain areas. Its destructive and colonial history of relations with indigenous peoples does look very close to what it does in the United States, with murderous policies that are still going on in both nations. Understanding all of this requires that critical scholars and activists are quite cautious about simply employing categories from outside to deal with Brazilian specificities. Thus, although they may be helpful in seeing things that were partly missed before, we can't just import analyses of neoconservative positions, and say: here it is.

Brazil has its own long history of conservative ideological moments. But they aren't exactly the same as the United States. They overlap, but they're not identical. Its union movements are different, its history of black struggles is different, its history of gender, the constitution of its class movements is specific to the ways in which racialized capitalism has been and is constituted. All of these, again, overlap of course. But we need to be careful. I'm saying these things because I agree very strongly with Iana on this. It's a very dangerous thing to appropriate analyses from the outside without at the same time engaging in a serious attempt to see what these categories were responding to. We shouldn't simply say something like we'll use this as a mirror. Here's the mirror on the United States, it's exactly the same in Brazil. No, it's not. Now, the danger of that is not just political, in the short term. It's a danger intellectually, in the long term, as well.

Let us be honest here, however. Unfortunately, the ideological attacks on critical teaching in schools in Brazil, the United States, and in places such as Japan and elsewhere may make this even more difficult. One of the current agendas of the authoritarian right, the new (not only "neo") conservatives, and the neoliberals, is to have us ask and answer the question of why we are funding the teaching of history. After all, it's not really "useful knowledge for the economy and to create a more efficient society and workforce." But, for them, if we are indeed teaching history, we should not support honest and critical histories of the nature of our societies. So, it makes it even more difficult for critical scholars in Brazil to say it's not the same, because that would require serious critical historical work and increasingly in Chile, in the United States, in Mexico, in Poland, in Hungary, in China, and in so many other places throughout the world, as well, it's very, very hard to generate long-term funding for critical historical research. The effects of this are very significant. It causes the loss of memory, and then the loss of legitimacy of indigenous movements and local movements in general.

Complex realities may superficially sound somewhat the same as those pictured by neoconservatives but may have a very different genesis. If the problem is defined as “neoconservatism” then the solution focuses on a particular set of political, ideological, and intellectual conditions. But if the conservative impulses and movements are more varied and draw on a wide set of fears and a wider range of aggressive politics then our own analyses and organizing actions must respond to the more complicated agendas and politics of this *new* conservatism. This makes a difference in how we think about counter-hegemonic work that tries to interrupt the Right. How do you convince people to move from following conservative positions to a more progressive alliance? How do we support those popular critically democratic movements, those who are building a different kind of political alliance, those who are working against Bolsonaro or working against authoritarians throughout the world? Can this be politically and tactically successful if then we always assume that the understandings that we're doing politically and pedagogically in the US, will work well with them here?

We risk misunderstanding both the realities of large groups of people and the specifics of the unfortunately quite social pedagogic moves that the conservative alliance makes to bring people under its leadership in Brazil. That's writing off millions of people and, it's a very bad tactical mistake. This is not at all to say that we should ignore my analyses in book such as *Educating the Right Way*. It is an important set of analyses, one that I believe has crucial insights. However, critical people in each nation that employs it to understand their lived situations need to read it and use it in ways that are closely connected to the specifics of their own realities.

Question: We can say that the neoconservatives were aligned around anti-communism, and that made me think a lot about the history of *Escola sem Partido* in Brazil. The more “intellectual” wing of the movement came up with this discourse about macro politics. But when we examine their actions in schools, it is clearly re-articulated to an agenda mostly focused on the so-called “gender ideology.” At first, the public agenda was focused in trying to find communist teachers, but then in practice it became much more about controlling bodies, regarding gender, sexuality, and also a very racist agenda, if we are to consider the recent research about this movement. And so, could we say that there is a convergence of this intellectually neoconservative group, and the authoritarian populists, and the neoliberals? Could we perhaps say that they converge around an anti-progress agenda? For neoconservatives and authoritarian populists, there is an agenda based on fear, through threats to the lifestyle. And for the neoliberals there is this idea of keeping liberal society as it is, ultimately keeping class structure as it is. So, even though they are different groups, are they converging around this idea of anti-progress?

Michael W. Apple: There is no doubt that there's a convergence, that's why I talk about the borders between these groups. Again, these are ideal types. These boxes have holes in them. And people move back and forth in some ways, depending on the crises. Now, some of them are anti-progress, no doubt about that, and there is no doubt that the same groups, who are now mobilizing in many nations, are very worried about a range of power relations. An example would be that there's legislation being passed in the United States, all over the United States, and in many nations for example in Africa about trans, and gay, and lesbian people. And the attack on them often looks like this: “how are they going to use the same bathrooms”, “what happens to my daughter who is an athlete playing basketball, on the women's basketball team, and now a trans person, is “he” going to be on the team?”, “Well, we know that male bodies are different than girls’ bodies, and it makes it unfair to my daughter, who is a real girl, not someone who's artificially made a girl”. That's really interesting. So, here we have the language being stolen from feminist forms. “My daughter has worked very hard, she should have the right to play basketball, and her future not impeded,

not interrupted by all these boys who want to be girls.” So, it's anti-gay and anti-trans, and covered by feminist forms, to defend the rights of “real” women.

It reminds me, that this disarticulation/rearticulation process is just like the word “democracy”, which is a sliding signifier, and has no essential meaning. Think about this as if key words are like a glass. Here's the glass called democracy, we can either have it filled with very thick and participatory forms or we can pour in meanings that say it's all about individual choice. So, here we have the left saying: yes, it is about individual choice. Trans people, it's their bodies, they can control their bodies, they should have the choice, funded by the government and health care, to become women, or women to become men, or to subvert that binary. But those same words are taken up by parents who say “that's not fair to my daughter”, right? In addition, “when the team goes into the locker room, and they want to get undressed, or they go into the bathroom and this man comes in, who is in transition, that's disgusting”.

This actually raises a very important point about the mobility of progressive terms. They can be used both for progressive things and for a more retrograde politics. This is where the distinction that's made by John Locke, between person rights and property rights, is not subtle enough. The defense of person rights, which as opposed to property rights is I have always supported. This would usually mean things like the following. No one should be without a home. The state must provide serious health care, and homes for everybody. But conservative forces have taken the language of person rights and used it for their own ends. That exact same discourse is used like a hammer. It's used to say, “but you're denying choice to my daughter, she's a real girl.” This makes it very hard to fight against. It's blended together with aims that are anti-progressive.

This is where neoliberalism has an advantage because it wants choice. It says, “We can solve this.” But it does this without actually challenging dominant ideological limits on thicker forms of democracy. So, if Michael is a person of color, we don't have to change a school curriculum, we can give a voucher, which in the United States is like a “Bolsa Familia”, but for schools. It's a check. You can choose your own school; the state will provide. It is clear, however, that in the real world of schooling, the results of this educational voucher policy reproduce the racial state. Right now, private schools, and voucher schools are much more segregated by race than any schools, any other schools in the United States. Thus, neoliberalism and its emphasis on democracy as simply individual choice has led to even more racialization. But ideologically it's very clever. To them that's progress. We'll solve the problem. Brazil has tried to solve that problem in exactly the same way. So, you want people to see the government as legitimate? Anyone with money will send their kids to a private school. Given the defunding of the public schools, it's a competing thing about what do you do with your own children because you have an ethical responsibility for them, as well. I don't think it's “anti-progress,” since the process actually redefines progress through a process of disarticulation and rearticulation. There's no doubt it's complicated, and it works to help the right.

Question: In the Brazilian context it's difficult to make a clear distinction between authoritarian populism and neoconservatism. As you already mentioned, some political actors from the right usually integrate the skill of both groups. You said that the groups are fluid, the borders are flexible depending on the circumstances. So, we would like to hear from you a little bit more, if it is possible, to make a clear distinction between authoritarian populism and neo-conservatism. You mentioned that we're seeing the increase of the ultra-authoritarian populism. It would seem to be that there was a growing disposition toward a new version of the authoritarian populism. Could you talk a bit more about this?

Michael W. Apple: These are political tendencies, with some overlapping. Much depends on the specific context and specific agendas. There are politics around race, around class, about sexuality

and gender and the body, about environmentalism, about ability, age, so you can say there are multiple agendas, some of them more powerful than others. Thus, I don't want to be in the business of saying class eats everything. But I also want us to remember that all of this is also about class. Capitalism is gendered and raced. Capitalism is a racializing economy. It is founded on class relations, but it is clearly as well built around an imperial racist project, and the unpaid labor of women. I want us to always keep that in mind, there are certain things that don't go away. These are still the dynamics that are key elements in rightist mobilization. Thus, we must be open to understanding the specifics of situations. There are some groups for whom the most important motivating thing is religion, so those would be closer to the sphere of authoritarian populism. Thus, in my book "Educating the Right Way", and in the second edition even more, I spent a lot of attention on the relationship of authoritarian populism to ultra-conservative religious forms. This is growing massively in Brazil. And for many people they will justify their discrimination against gay people, against trans people, and occasionally against people of color based on this.

Well, that's complicated and I will come back to that in a second. Based on these religious forms, they will argue that in the Bible it says that man shall not lie down with another man. But the Bible also says a woman who has her period should not be allowed out in the street and similar kinds of things that remind us that the Bible is an historical document. This simple example demonstrates the selective reading and the contradictions of using the Bible. But the key point here is that in these cases and movements the justification of conservative political action is biblical, or the Quran, or the Torah. The dominance of sacred texts means that you are closer to populist authoritarian forms. Your agenda may be getting more choice in schools, and education in general, and you may want books that you consider "controversial" kept out of schools. You may want *Escola sem Partido* (schools without parties). The agendas may look very, very similar, so there's overlap in some ways, but in this case the justification and the arguments are biblical. Now, for some ultra-racist groups the justification was and, in some cases, still is that white people are superior as God's creations, and it's biblical that black people should be "less than" and can be enslaved. We will christianize them. That's the history of indigenous people being christianized in Brazil and in the United States.

Ultra-right antisemitism is also growing by leaps and bounds in very many nations as well. And that's distressing in a whole array of ways. It too is often justified in similar ways. However, there may be some movements where similar conservative policies are not driven by religious ideological sentiments, but are still quite sexist, and quite racist. Or they can be class-based, based on an assumption that poor people are poor because they don't work hard. Now, some of that is a neoliberal agenda, but these folks who are supporting this position might be working class. This is a crucial point.

Let me give a personal example that is still a part of my memory. Here I must speak very honestly. I grew up very poor, and there were times all we had to eat was potatoes and sour cream, for days. And other times, when my father got paid, we ate other things. One of my closest friends, also came from a very poor family. They were living in very poor housing. Parts of both our families did not want the two of us to play with the other even poorer kids, because they were "not respectable." They were poor because they were supposedly "lazy." Yet, as a dying industrial city, the factories had closed. There were very few jobs in the city where we lived, Paterson, New Jersey. Paterson was an old textile city that had a very strong history of leftist politics. However, given the emerging globalization of the manufacturing of clothing, there were basically no jobs. But the explanation for this among a number of other poor and working-class people was that these folks who didn't have jobs were consistently lazy. Now, clearly that's a neoliberal understanding and a neoliberal agenda, but they're working class. Do I say that because of these beliefs they are members of the neoliberalist movement? No, not really. I need to more fully understand the elements of

good and bad sense in tension in their consciousness – in a Gramscian way. They are members, at times, of the conservative working class, who must uphold their own pride in their labor. Thus, instead of saying it's capitalism that is destroying my labor constantly, it's these undisciplined working-class folks, who are getting something for nothing.

We can see this when some people in Brazil and elsewhere are saying things like, “Why are those people getting the Bolsa Familia, when I've worked very, very hard and I don't? They don't deserve it, I work very, very hard.” So, these are groups that are, again, not necessarily religious. They're right-wing populist, that doesn't mean that they're going to be authoritarian and back Bolsonaro with everything. This is a very difficult kind of issue. I tend to look at what's the logic of justification, but that doesn't mean they won't agree with the rightist policies even when their justifications are different. But the solution, for many of the people who are working class and not a supporter of conservative religious movements, is not to have everybody be a conservative Christian and that we must restore christianity to all schools. They want choice. They may want the neoliberal agenda, and they want a disciplined body and may be quite patriarchal, but it's not necessarily biblical. I don't know whether I've answered the question, but you've caused me to continue thinking creatively about it. In order to go any further this would require a lot more that I would have to say.

Question: Our questions are very focused, as you can see, on trying to better understand conservatism in education, and I think it resonates a bit with what you were saying before, especially about these different groups that make this alliance. In Brazil, analysts use the concept of neoconservatism as a synonym of new conservatism. Is that a sufficient definition? Can you explain what the appropriate use of neoconservatism is?

Michael W. Apple: Yeah. First of all, as I have stressed throughout this interview, I don't think in the United States neoconservatism would be a synonym of new conservatives. Given the history of that term, I think that it's confusing to call it neoconservatism. I wouldn't. However, if there was not already a use of neoconservative, if the term neoconservatism didn't have a long history in Brazil, then for Brazilians to talk to Brazilians perhaps sometimes neoconservatism can be translated as new conservatives. But I still be very worried about that because I think the term is polluted by its history throughout the world, and certainly in most English-speaking countries. I don't want to be imperial here, but the history of the term is specific about its intellectual roots. I'm certain that there were some people at universities, and in right-wing think tanks in Brazil who were and are neoconservatives. That's a very limited group.

Certainly there were people in Chile, under Pinochet, who were neoconservatives, and they were and are strongly influenced by a particular set of economic principles, and conservative moral and intellectual principles. And I'm certain that there were some in Brazil. But we're talking about something that is much, much broader than that. So, would all economically oriented neoconservatives in Chile have been totally in favor of Pinochet? For some, perhaps, they might have argued against dropping people out of helicopters into the ocean. For some he went too far. (But once again, the absent presence of silence and acquiescence among many dominant groups was a key element here.). But, no matter what, this was a particularly murderous form of neoconservatism. In Chile, they combined elements of neoconservatism and its fear of socialism and communism with a profound commitment to key neoliberal economic principles, especially privatization and the various institutions of capital being the leading forces of everything of importance in society. Yet, for them, in order to restore “real” democracy, they begin with a commitment to economic privatization and a desocializing possessive individualism as the only crucial identity for all people. To them, this and only this is real democracy.

To achieve this, they felt that they had to discipline the people so that they understand the importance of the radical transformations they were putting in place; and they needed to do away with any forms of substantive democracy for now so that the people would be “disciplined” and accept the leadership of this combination of neoconservatism and neoliberalism. Of course, there are some powerful people like that in Brazil. They would vote for Bolsonaro possibly. But the justification and motivation of large groups of conservatives for Bolsonaro or for Donald Trump in the US or for Orbán in Hungary or Erdoğan in Turkey, right now is much broader and much more complicated. It is not just neoconservatives, for those are a relatively small group. Given this, as I said earlier, I think that I would prefer the term new conservatives. However, I'd also want to find out, though, how new is it.

Brazil has always had conservative movements and mobilizations, so one of the dangers of the concept of new conservatism is it forgets that there's always been racism. In keyways, the country was founded on racism. There has been and is still very real and systematic oppression of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people. There's always been strong patriarchal dynamics and power relations, with disrespect for women and their bodies and autonomy. There's always been the destruction of the environment, that's Brazil! That's not all of Brazil. Brazil also has been my teacher about what can be done in mobilization. So, it's like saying that any support for Lula now is part of the “new progressivism”. Excuse me! Lula would not be Lula without hundreds of years of people saying no, from the very first ship that landed here. Without the restoration of the real history of Brazil it would be like saying that as in Mexico, when the conquerors and missionaries came off that first generation of boats and got on their horses and started to kill people, all the indigenous people said: “they must be gods”. Therefore, they simply always accepted colonization or just turned around and ran. That's very wrong and a continuation of racist narratives.

Oppressions create resistances constantly. Let us remember the realities that so many oppressed people experienced, people without whom there would be no economy in the US or Brazil or so many other nations. Let us remember the millions of people stolen from Africa and sold as disposable commodities. Let us remember that hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of them died in the middle passage, on their way to places like Brazil. Indeed, many ships were often nearly empty by the time they got to Brazil. People died. To tacitly or overtly think that all of those people who lived and got off those boats, were passive that is the most racist version of history I've ever seen. But, of course, for dominant conservatives in power here (and increasingly in the US), any honest teaching of the history of that reality and of the centuries of cultural and social creativity and activism should be purged from schools because it's about “parties,” and that would be too political. That's my answer for the question.

Question: So, last question. It relates to this idea of talking about new conservatism or maybe the term we are starting to debate, which is an idea of rearticulated conservatism. This rearticulated conservatism mobilizes historic conservative principles, such as racism, militarism, anti-communism, attacks on feminism, and LGBTQIA+ movements, and updates to the current times. So, that's the idea of rearticulated conservatism. These aspects were there already, but they changed, right? There is a modernization of it. So, we do not visualize an influential neoconservative organized group, in the mode of the US neoconservatives, operating in Brazil but, instead, we see the influence of the US neoconservative movement in the Brazilian conservative imaginary. In your opinion, is there a difference between neoconservatives and conservatism?

Michael W. Apple: I think I've answered it already. But let me say a few more things. I do think that, once again, this is where Stuart Hall's work on disarticulation and rearticulation is crucial. In order to answer this, we have to ask what the creative pedagogic forms were, the creative ideological

forms, that evolved and how did they work to convince people to come under the leadership of dominant groups. This is Gramsci's question; how do new hegemonic blocks form? And you can't understand any of my work, from the last four books, starting from *Cultural Politics and Education* [*Política Cultural e Educação, Editora Cortez*] and *Educating the "Right" Way* [*Educando à Direita, Editora Cortez*] all the way up to the latest ones, such as *Can Education Change Society?* [*A Educação pode mudar a Sociedade?, Editora Vozes*] and *The Struggle for Democracy in Education* [*A Luta pela Democracia na Educação, Editora Vozes*] unless you understand that it's got three questions: 1) How did the righteous mobilizations work and how do we understand that?; 2) What's the processes of disarticulation and re-articulation?; 3) What can we learn from these processes?

I've given some examples of that, throughout my answers. An example is when we've talked about your question about media. Here we have the demand for voice by racist, and anti-feminist, men. It's grounded in the neoliberal agenda and its vision of individual rights without social responsibilities to others. It's based on an identity and a contradictory commitment to a position that I must be free to speak. This seems partly progressive, but it denies the oppressive effects and situates the "I" outside its social content. Basically, it is asocial. But it solves the contradiction by recreating a new social space that links the conservative voice to the conservative social group. So, it disarticulated what was once a progressive form and reconnects it to a fundamentally conservative movement. This is exactly how hegemonic discourse operates. Marx was very insightful when he said: look, feudalism was horrible, capitalism was a little better. So, reformist feminism is never enough, but it sure as hell is better than what came before, which is selling women's bodies, often murderous patriarchal control, women's bodies being owned (Welcome to the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan.)

So, we have to ask what is the new, what are the new forms of disarticulation and rearticulation. How do dominant groups take the resources that are available, resources that may have elements of partial good sense, and use these resources to bring people under their leadership? Remember when I started off by answering the first question, and I said, wait a minute, this is not a war of maneuver, it's a war position. A war of position requires that we think about what is the cultural assemblage in ideological work. It's actually education and it's often quite creative. At times, paradoxically it can be seen as a manipulative and rightist version of Freire. How do people get convinced to join new alliances? To leave their previous identities? How are new identities built? Or how are old identities revitalized? How does race talk get done so that it sounds not racist but "commonsense"? How do sexist claims no longer sound sexist? How does the unsayable become sayable and how is all this justified and accepted?

I gave the example of the father and mother, who have a daughter, and the daughter is talented at basketball. They're using language and previous struggles that many women have been persecuted and at times died for: "I must be treated with respect. My daughter is a talented basketball player. But you (the government school) will support having a trans person join the team, and you'll deny financial support to the school if the trans person doesn't get on the team." (These financial penalties have become law in some states in the US.) The parents go on to say that "you can't defund that team, you can't allow a trans person on the team because it will take away our daughter's rights." For them, boys are better at sports. Their position is based on the assumption that boys by their very nature will be better than the girls. For the parents you are denying their rights to have a daughter who competes equally in basketball.

It has certain partial elements of feminism in it. How does that vision get turned by neoliberalism into strong anti-gay, and anti-trans sentiment? For many people's understandings of progressive things, it's a progressive claim: "I want my daughter to be free" How does positions like that that get turned into the support of Bolsonaro? Or Trump or Erdoğan? So, that to me is

the real question, how does that work? Of course, a lot of things that are tried, don't work. These are the things that do work. But I can assure you that many groups have tried other things.

So, right now, for instance, there is a major one that surprises the hell out of me: This is the growth of anti-vaccine as a mobilizing force, when Brazil has a history of one of the most responsive places in the world for vaccines. I'll bet that's a surprise to the right in Brazil, but they tried it, and it worked for many people when an anti-vaccine position is so publicly supported by Bolsonaro. And it certainly has worked as a mobilizing force even more powerfully in the US and elsewhere, moving people to the right in defense of "freedom." So, we have to also ask: again, this is my argument about absent presences, what was tried and didn't work? That would tell us a lot.

One thing that has been tried and has now had contradictory effects in the United States, is radical religious movements. It's very interesting that increasing numbers of people in the United States have been turned off by aggressive fundamentalism. That doesn't mean that they're pro-abortion, for example, since what is called the "pro-life" movement has grown very strong in the US. But for many people, the justification is now different. It's not about God, it's now about a position that argues that from the time of conception fetuses are real human beings. That belief has been disarticulated from the fundamentalists who claim that "the bible said it, therefore it must be true," to the neoliberal agenda, which is: everybody has a right to live. It has now largely part of a struggle over personhood. This has led to a very large increase in support for anti-abortion legislation, with even a number of progressives changing their positions over time. This is a very complex example, one filled with contradictory elements and contradictory discourse. It claims to respect the right to life for all living things at the same time in reality it created the conditions where thousands of mostly poor women will die. Most of the agenda makes no exceptions for rape and incest. Thus, the moral issues are very complex to say the least. I'm going on for a while, but I think it's really crucial that we ask what does it mean, what's the creative process?

Let me also again say this. I've maintained throughout this interview that the politics and processes of articulation/rearticulation are central to understanding and interrupting the Right. Critical educators like ourselves have two tasks: understanding and interruption. Both are important. As I have discussed in much more detail elsewhere, this leads to a number of responsibilities and actions that we must take. But this would be the topic of a whole other interview that we may want to do at some time. We've been talking about conservative movements and how we could understand them and their success. As I mentioned in my answer to a previous question: people are not puppets. Processes of disarticulation and rearticulation are also going on profoundly by progressive mobilizations and groups. So, every one of these issues that we have talked about here: racism, militarism, anti-communism, feminism, LGBTQIA+ movements, environmentalists, all of those have mobilizations going on not only by the Right. Each of these is embodied in groups that are consciously trying to pull people out of the umbrella of conservative modernization and bring them back into a restructured set of progressive movements. They are building both traditional and new hybrid alliances. If you want to see some of this in action, there are two recent books in which I've been involved that may be helpful *The Struggle for Democracy and Education [A Luta pela Democracia na Educação, Editora Vozes]* and the latest book by Rita Verma and me, *Disrupting Hate in Education*. Both try very hard to deal not only with the processes of disarticulation and rearticulation but also how these are involved in interrupting dominance. I think that these issues are crucial and may be worth talking even more about them at a later time.

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