

The Representation and Critique of Ideology in the Curriculum

Jimin Wang *

Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

* Corresponding author Email: JmWang99@hotmail.com

Abstract: Curriculum is an important component to support the operation of school education, and it is often regarded as value-neutral in daily implementation. Instead of thinking that the curriculum is value-neutral, we should think that it is pseudo-neutral with the implication of mainstream class ideology. In the view of Michael W. Apple, the representative of American critical pedagogy, the ideology in the curriculum is mainly manifested as the homogenization of mainstream culture and value with official and legalized curriculum knowledge. The implementation of curriculum causes the loss of individuation of children's growth, to realize the technical governance of ideology by simple and hegemonic system management. Apple's analysis reveals a strong criticism. The main criticism points are that curriculum knowledge has obscured the difference of culture and value, curriculum implementation has shaped the submission of students and teachers, and curriculum management has ignored the complexity of systems and organizations. Although the discussion of ideology in the curriculum is one of Apple's main topics, his overemphasis on ideology in the curriculum tends to lead to the absence of the overall picture of curriculum research and the one-sided analysis of ideology.

Keywords: Critical Curriculum Theory; Ideology; Michael W. Apple.

1. Introduction

In the familiar school education, the curriculum is an important part of supporting the operation of its system. Although the curriculum is familiar enough for educational practitioners and researchers, familiarity itself implies a de-strangeness. This inertia of distance from strangers often leads educators to lose sight of the true nature and potential relationships of the curriculum. Among them, a more important potential relationship is the relationship between curriculum and ideology. The more representative and influential discussion on this relationship is American scholar Apple. Apple is an internationally renowned critical educator and critical curriculum theorist [1]. He has written many books on culture and power, power and control, economics and education, such as *Ideology and Curriculum*, *Official Knowledge*, and *The School of Democracy*. Among them, the book *Ideology and Curriculum* not only has far-reaching influence, but also focuses on the relationship between curriculum and ideology. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out the specific representation of ideology in the curriculum, anchor the fulcrum of Apple's criticism of ideology in the curriculum, and try to open a broader discussion space of the relationship between ideology and curriculum by analyzing Apple's discussion of ideology in the curriculum.

2. Why is Ideology Implied in the Curriculum

The curriculum does not exist independently in the society, but is closely connected with all aspects of society. From a relational perspective, the curriculum should be limited by politics, economy and culture, and at the same time promote political, economic and cultural production by playing its own role. This two-way interaction is due to an act of placing. This means examining the curriculum within the larger context of politics, economics and culture. From the very beginning of

Ideology and the Curriculum, Apple points out that education is not a value-neutral enterprise [2]. As one of the important elements of educational implementation, curriculum naturally cannot be value-neutral. So, what is the value in the curriculum? The answer to this question involves the relationship between curriculum and ideology. In terms of the relationship between the two, there are mainly two types: the ideological curriculum and the ideology in the curriculum, and Apple obviously focuses on the analysis and elaboration of the ideology in the curriculum. According to Apple, the main reason for the implicit ideology in the curriculum is that the curriculum serves the interests of the economy and mainstream ideology. In other words, the curriculum should serve the cultural reproduction of certain classes in a dominant position in society. The inequalities between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, powerful and weak, etc. need to be implemented, transmitted and consolidated through the curriculum, and Apple's investigation into the history of the curriculum also proves that the curriculum has always done so, that is, it implies the mainstream ideology [3]. Therefore, no matter the explicit curriculum or the implicit curriculum, it implies a certain ideology. How, then, are these ideologies represented in the curriculum?

3. The Specific Representation of Ideology in the Curriculum

In his book *Ideology and Curriculum*, Apple mainly focuses on curriculum knowledge, curriculum implementation and curriculum management. In the aspect of curriculum knowledge, the ideology of the curriculum is embodied in the homogenization of mainstream culture and value with official and legalized knowledge. In the implementation of the curriculum, the ideology of the curriculum is embodied in the loss of individuation of children's growth through the curriculum content and communication methods. In the aspect of curriculum

management, the ideology in the curriculum is embodied in the primary system management to realize the technical management of ideology.

3.1. How to Use Curriculum Knowledge to Produce Homogenized Culture and Values

Curriculum knowledge is not neutral, but a homogenized production of culture and values on the basis of historical penetration of mainstream class ideology, with the purpose of maintaining the established order of the ruling class. However, if directly propagating or stating curriculum knowledge is ideological, it will lead to the process of teaching curriculum knowledge not being smooth. Therefore, it is necessary to fake package the knowledge of the course in a way that is not easily detected, and to confirm that it is legitimate, official, and neutral. Only in this way can curriculum knowledge assume its dual role, on the one hand, to impart skills and knowledge that prepare for the future, and on the other hand, to maintain the established order of the ruling class and ensure the continuation of inequalities in the whole society. As Apple says, schools not only control people, but also help control values. Because they preserve and distribute what is called 'legitimate knowledge' [4] - that is, knowledge that 'all of us must have' - schools confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of special groups. However, this is not all, because the ability of a group to make its own knowledge 'the knowledge of all' is related to the power of that group in the broader political economy. The reason why curriculum knowledge is 'legalized knowledge' is that it is closely related to the class interests of some special groups.

Thus, in school education, certain cultures have a dominant position, and other cultures that do not conform to these specific cultures will be 'reformed' or 'excluded'. This causes individuals to 'transform' or 'exclude' their original culture while learning knowledge, so as to obtain the 'admission ticket' to integrate into the culture of some special groups, that is, the corresponding cultural identity and value identification. This leads to the continuous incorporation, analysis, transformation and production of culture and value of curriculum knowledge in the relationship of 'teaching-receiving', and finally produces the culture corresponding to the specific social class. It is also in this process that the ideology in the curriculum is exposed, that is, the homogenization of culture and value is carried out with illegitimate 'legalized knowledge' that conforms to the interests of a particular class.

3.2. The Implementation of Curriculum Causes the Loss of Individuation of Children's Growth

Ideology in the curriculum is not only reflected in the pseudo-legitimacy of curriculum knowledge, but also in the process of curriculum implementation [5]. In the course of curriculum implementation, the infiltration of ideology mainly exists in the course content and the communication between teachers and students. Apple's discussion of this topic begins in kindergarten, because he believes that kindergarten is a critical period in the acquisition of the rules, norms, values, and tendencies necessary for our existing institutionalized life. The principles of socialization learned in kindergarten will lay the foundation for subsequent learning and growth. Indeed, when human life is first incorporated into institutionalized education, the corresponding social norms and social interactions become a

conceptual system that must be studied. No matter in the classroom of kindergarten, or in the classroom of primary and secondary schools, all kinds of systems and rules have been preset before individuals enter the classroom, and the rules are strengthened and consolidated by participating in social situations during the course of curriculum implementation. The use of materials, the nature of authority, the nature of personal relationships, spontaneous comments, and other aspects of everyday classroom life all contribute to the child's growing awareness of his or her role in the classroom and understanding of the social environment. To understand roles and social contexts is to learn social values and rules. Behind these increasingly strengthened rules is the infiltration of ideology, which is embodied in the concrete representation of course content and teacher-student communication.

In terms of curriculum content, starting from kindergarten, we need to guide children to remember their own cabinets, their own storage boxes, etc., and carry out corresponding storage and sorting after each activity. These are called rule education or safety education, and there is a fixed time period for such educational activities. Then in the communication between teachers and students, the ideological characteristics are more obvious. The interaction between teachers and students itself is for the recognition of common social values and for children to accept these common social values. Because it is only when these shared social values are accepted that the classroom can take place. Therefore, it can be found that the ideology in curriculum implementation is not only reflected in the course content or the communication between teachers and students, but also reflected in the connection between them. Therefore, whether it is content, communication or relationship, it is actually the concrete representation of ideology in the implementation of the curriculum, which will lead to the loss of individuality in children's growth. As Apple argues, unquestioning acceptance of authority and the vicissitudes of life in an institutional environment is the first lesson for kindergarteners. This unquestioning acceptance includes the consistency of answers, the similarity of works, and the obedience to rules, and thus the loss of individuality in children.

3.3. To Realize the Technological Governance of Ideology Through Curriculum Management

Curriculum management is the application of system theory and method in the curriculum field, which embodies ideological technocracy in concrete system management. Here, we need to see that curriculum management is not only permeated with technologically processed ideology, because the act of legitimizing someone's knowledge as official knowledge is itself technical, but also that curriculum management can play a technical role as ideology, such as compliance with fixed procedures, compliance with management techniques, and so on. Therefore, the technical management of ideology through curriculum management is also a representation of ideology in the curriculum. In *Ideology and Curriculum*, Apple argues that whether researchers, educational decision-makers, or students, they usually take the form of procedural development to ensure certainty and rationalization, so as to make all aspects of people's activities as clear as possible. This is actually a technical curriculum view. This curriculum view in its specific design is completed by system management, such as

the famous Taylor principle. What educational goals should schools pursue? What educational experiences can be provided to achieve these goals? How to organize these educational experiences effectively? How to determine that these goals are being achieved? These four kinds of basic questions constitute the basic face of Taylor's curriculum view, but in Apple's view, this declarative linear curriculum is precisely the search for technology and certainty. When systems management is applied to education, its philosophical simplicity and striking certainty is perhaps evident in the declarations calling for the establishment of those institutional systems. These declarations are not only technical, systemically managed and controlled, but also ideological. Because when teachers or students conduct performance evaluation and curriculum evaluation according to the principles of curriculum management, curriculum management is already playing an ideological role. This ideology not only represents the ideology of some specific groups in the society, but also represents the ideology of curriculum management technology. Therefore, in the sense of technopolitics [6], we can think that curriculum management and its management techniques can realize the technical management of ideology in the curriculum.

4. The Radical Critique of Ideology in the Curriculum

As a representative of critical pedagogy, Apple shows his critical spirit while characterizing and analyzing the ideology in the curriculum. Apple's criticism of ideology in the curriculum mainly lies in the fact that curriculum knowledge has obscured the difference of culture and value, curriculum implementation has shaped the submission of students and teachers, and curriculum management has ignored the complexity of system and organization.

4.1. Curriculum Knowledge Obliterates the Difference of Culture and Value

Curriculum knowledge is the knowledge legitimized by the knowledge of some specific groups. In fact, this is not only the hegemony and colonization of knowledge, but also the pseudo-legalization of school knowledge. In Apple, legalized knowledge is also called official knowledge. One of the main issues of Ideology and the Curriculum, he argues, is how official knowledge represents the ideological structure of the dominant groups in society, how schools legitimize these limited, partial standards of knowledge as unquestionable truths. Then, through the analysis of the entire curriculum history, Apple found that non-mainstream culture and values or cultural differences were to be excluded or transformed in the curriculum. In New York City in the 1850s, when the public school system was stabilizing, schools were seen as institutions that preserved the cultural supremacy of the 'native' people; education is the way to protect the community life, values, norms and economic interests of powerful groups; schools can be a tremendous force for moral reform, pushing immigrant children and black people to be like 'us'. Thus, as far as we know, cultural differences have no legitimacy at all for many people who have had an important impact on the growth of schooling. Each 'I' represents the culture or value of a certain group, but when this 'I' and 'we' are not integrated, 'I' has only two choices, one is to accept the fate of being excluded or eliminated, and the other is to actively transform itself and incorporate 'I' into 'we'. Therefore, the curriculum

knowledge only represents the knowledge of some specific groups, and the difference of culture and value is obscured.

4.2. The Implementation of the Curriculum has Shaped the Submission of Students and Teachers

Whether it is the course content, the communication between teachers and students, or the ideology implied in the relationship between them, they all shape the subjection of students and teachers to different degrees. Because institutions and rules work not only on students, but also on teachers. Apple's analysis of kindergarten students and teachers is not intended to discuss kindergarten in terms of kindergarten, but to say that kindergarten, as the beginning of institutionalized education, its domestication requirements are far greater than individual experience and needs. Specific course content is less important than the experience as a learner, and personality qualities such as obedience, enthusiasm, adaptability, and perseverance are appreciated more than academic ability. These requirements of personality quality led to the individual's personality not growing by itself, but is planned by people, by the curriculum, by a certain ideology. Thus, in front of the ideology that represents a specific group, students and teachers are in a position of submission. This subjection is not the subjection that the individual consciously feels, but is unconsciously led to subjection in the seemingly neutral curriculum implementation. Isn't this the fall of individual subjectivity? The same is true not only for students, but also for teachers, who are praised by Apple as 'intellectuals' and unconsciously transmit the ideology of a certain group of people in the process of implementing the curriculum. In this unconscious transitivity, teachers implement the curriculum according to the established curriculum design and corresponding curriculum principles, and do not really design the curriculum creatively to a certain extent. Therefore, whether it is the emphasis on personality qualities such as obedience and obedience at the student level or the unconscious transmission at the teacher level, it is to accept an ideology that is not neutral in a school environment that thinks it is neutral. Therefore, the individual submission of students and teachers is shaped.

4.3. Curriculum Management Ignores the Complexity of System and Organization

System and organization are neutral concepts, and their application in curriculum management is for the stability and development of curriculum. However, it also exposes the cult of technocracy and efficiency in curriculum management and the search for certainty. This is exactly the opposite of 'not being controlled' proposed by Rosa [7], also a critical theorist. What curriculum management needs is control. In the course management, the linear evaluation represented by Taylor, the management mode of linear organization and the attempt to eliminate the conflict in the course field all show the simplicity and hegemony of the course management. As Apple criticizes, the simplicity and hegemony of curriculum management is not only the mechanization of curriculum organization, but also the legitimate treatment of schools as factories, students as products, and education as assembly lines. This kind of curriculum management ignores the complexity of system and organization. To return to the complexity of systems and organizations, curriculum management needs to be seen as a truly neutral domain, and

conflicts in the curriculum should be treated reasonably, rather than simply erased. Now, when the tendency towards conflict resolution is questioned, redefined, and consensus sought, proponents of systems management processes in education can, and indeed do, assert that they seek only to solve their problems with science. The search for a consensus in the curriculum is not done in a purely scientific way, and the science that these proponents understand is narrow. Apple argues that the curriculum is complex and that consensus-building needs to take place in a process of conflict, rather than through the recognition of certain social values. How to reasonably deal with the disorder brought by conflict and the order brought by recognition is the key to the complex system and organization of curriculum management. All in all, the current curriculum management has a certain degree of simplicity and hegemony, ignoring the complexity of the system and organization.

5. Conclusion

As a representative of American critical pedagogy and critical curriculum theory, Apple systematically analyzed the ideology in curriculum in his book *Ideology and Curriculum*, which is mainly embodied in curriculum knowledge, curriculum implementation and curriculum management. At the same time of analysis, Apple also carried out corresponding criticism. He believes that the pseudo-legalized curriculum knowledge only represents the culture of some specific groups, which has obscured the difference between culture and value. The ideology in the implementation of curriculum shapes the subjection of students and teachers. The technicalization and efficiency of curriculum management ignore the complexity of system and organization. Although after his radical criticism, Apple proposed some methods beyond the ideology in the curriculum, such as seeking the true curriculum knowledge, activating the critical consciousness of the subject, and reconstructing the complex system of the curriculum, these methods are still discussed in the relationship between the curriculum and ideology.

Apple puts too much emphasis on ideology in the curriculum, but the curriculum is not only ideology, and the curriculum can never be equal to ideology. This extreme emphasis will ignore the overall picture of curriculum research, and also lack the defense of ideology in the curriculum. The reason may be that Apple's criticism is based more on American society and education. But in China, ideology in the curriculum does not represent the ideology of certain privileges or specific groups, but the ideology of the people, and those external 'I' cannot break the curriculum structure of 'we'. This is because the Chinese curriculum

considers how to stand on the basis of Chinese culture to tolerate diverse cultures, rather than transforming local culture. This is not only the need to carry forward the fine traditional Chinese culture, but also the basic requirement to ensure China's ideological security.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on Contributor

Jimin Wang is a PhD candidate at Beijing Normal University. His research mainly concerns Educational Philosophy and Marxist Philosophy. He has written theses as *Realistic Pictures and Educational Implications of Children's Bodies* (2021), *Human Condition in the Society of Spectacle and Educational Transcendence* (2023), etc. He participated in several conferences, such as the 51st *Philosophy of education society of Australasia conference* and did an individual presentation in the conference. He also achieved an Outstanding Student Paper Award in the 5th *International Phenomenology and Pedagogy Conference*.

ORCID

Jimin Wang  <https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0001-7961-2410>.

References

- [1] Zhang Chuncao. The evolution path and reflection of Apple's Curriculum Hegemony Theory [J]. *Shanghai Education and Research*, 2019, (02):29-33.
- [2] Apple, M. W. *Ideology and Curriculum*. Huang Zhongjing, trans. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2001:28.
- [3] Zhou Meng, Zhang Lin. The Connotation, characteristics and Enlightenment of Apple's Ideological Theory [J]. *Ideological and Political Studies*, 2016, (05):54-58.
- [4] Chang Jin. On the generation of Legal Knowledge and its Enlightenment to China's Educational Reform--Based on Apple's educational philosophy perspective [J]. *Jiangsu Educational Research*, 2011, (25):16-19.
- [5] Wang Chenglong. Apple's Critical Curriculum View and its Enlightenment to the curriculum reform of basic education in China [J]. *Journal of Tianjin Academy of Education and Science*, 2012, (06):5-8.
- [6] Wu Guanjun. Why should we study Technopolitics [J]. *Chinese Social Science Evaluation*, 2022, (01):115-118.
- [7] Li Bofang. Seeking resonance with a better life--reading Rosa's Uncontrollable [J]. *Ideological and Political Teaching*, 2022, (11):95-96.