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INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY
OF EDUCATION

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Global Crises, Social Justice and Education

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Date of publication: October 25th, 2012

To cite this article: Valero, D. (2012). Global Crises, Social Justice and Education. [Review of the book]. *International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1(3), 314-316. doi: 10.4471/rise.2012.17

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/rise.2012.17>

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Reviews (I)

Apple, Michael W. (2010): *Global Crises, Social Justice and Education*. New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-00597-9

Global Crises, Social Justice and Education” is a sociological study of power relationships that occur in education as a result of globalization, and how social movements can tender alternatives to these relationships. This paper provides a strong theoretical and empirical basis, and advocates for a critical sociology of education.

The first chapter is aimed at laying the foundation for the future analyses focusing on how education and globalization are related and at defining the context in which this relation is developed, a raising immigration and an increasing integrated international economy. This context affects education by transferring the values of the global economy, which in most cases involves a reproduction of the neoliberal and neoconservative ethic in terms of relationships based on dominance and subordination. The work attempts to present a positive outlook on how these relationships materialize, by focusing on the practices of four specific areas where social movements achieve a relative amount of success in their claims and involve not a complete change in the educational policy but a challenge to these power relations.

Each of the next four chapters is devoted to a different region allowing a thorough and insightful review of each case, paying enough attention to their different realities and backgrounds, and proving that educational policies are influenced by the international economy. These regions cannot be understood as a complete panorama but instead provide examples of how critical educators and social movements are necessary to deal with the political designs that, even being different in each country, work against social justice. Moreover, the examples from these countries illustrate how reform movements have appeared worldwide as rooted facets of globalization.

The first case, “New Literacies and New Rebellions in the Global Age,” is dedicated to the United States, specifically to student activists in the immigrants rights movement. This chapter is a call to educators to support the efforts of students, providing opportunities to create a

network of potential partners, as other organizations related to globalization and social justice, and to acquire useful knowledge for activism, for example applying digital literacies in campaigns for social justice. In this way progressive movements rise against the consequences of an economic liberalism that requires public schools to transfer some specific knowledge to access the labor market, knowledge that is likewise determined and set by the ruling classes, which in turn perpetuates inequality.

The second case, “From the Rightest “Coup” to the New Beginning of Progressive Politics in Japanese Education,” uses an historical perspective to explain the current neoliberal trends calling for the return to imperial traditions and a pre-war model State intervention, taking rhetorical elements from British and American experiences. In 2006 the Liberal Government started reviewing the educational law of 1947, this law replaced the law of 1890, the latest placed education as an obligation of the state while the law of 1947, developed after the WWII, identified education as a human right. Liberals understood that law of 1947 was a Western imposition so they wanted to return to the values of 1890. Progressive organizations fight against the control of the State on all fronts (social policies, labour market, education, etc.) which in turn generates frustration among the populace and allows a space of action for these organizations, that win adherents every day.

“Israel/Palestine, Unequal Power, and Movements for Democratic Education,” the third case, is a critical examination of the relationships among social conflicts, education, the state and differential power in society. It offers three examples of schools that are the result of the community activists’ work. These counter-hegemonic schools made progress in areas related to inequality and disparity on the basis of ethnic origin, religion, and gender - all highly contentious issues in the Israel/Palestine world. The case illustrates the different forces that participated in each project and how they were developed, beginning with different political commitments and ideologies from different structural locations. Despite the inherent differences of each project there is an undeniable value of “conscious building of coalitions” between the school and communities it serves.

Latin America is the last of the four cases, although the example is focused on Mexico, specifically in the experience of two popular

educational institutions that focus their work on women in rural Mexico with low income, these community-based educational responses are occurring throughout Latin America. These experiences, that are forms of responses to Neoliberalism, develop forms of civil society that are consciously critical and offer alternative spaces of participation, structures and ideologies to fight against conservative movements. The authors end this chapter calling for unified resistance.

The last chapter is a cry for action aimed at progressive educators and activists, inciting them to learn with one and other to try to form a “decentralized unity.” Also reports that some retrogressive movements are adapting the ways of doing used successfully by the progressive movements and civil society. To do this, the authors say that there must be a process of disarticulation and articulation of the progressive discourses and languages which can transform them into elements of hegemonic powers. To understand this process, they proffer the employment of structural and poststructural theories, understanding them in terms of an equal dialogue with complementary objectives.

Apple et al.’s work is not especially interested in the idea of radical change to the overall system but in providing theoretical and practical tools that will show progress in civil societies around the world. The novelty is that by making a critical analysis the authors focus on what social, cultural and educational movements have done and can do to fight against these relationships, seeing these movements as agents of radical change.

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