

Unit 5

Education, Knowledge and Power

Contents

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Content of Education: What is Worth Knowing?
- 5.3 Perpetuation of Inequality through Education
- 5.4 Cultural and Economic Reproduction
- 5.5 Conclusion
- 5.6 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to discuss the:

- relationship existing between knowledge and power;
- political, economic and cultural influences on education; and
- cultural and economic reproduction of inequality.

5.1 Introduction

The concept of an educated person is socially and historically determined. The characteristics of an educated individual may vary from one time period and from one social milieu to another. A person considered educated in one time period and in a particular society will be different from the other one. There is a possibility that the most learned person in one society may be counted among the ignorant persons in some other society. For Mannheim (see Kumar 1992), not just the characteristics and attributes of an educated man, but even the aims of education can also be grasped historically. This is despite the fact that common sense suggests that the aims of education would be unchanging. Mannheim points out that the educational aims are shaped by history and that they are known to change from one society to another and from one period to another. John Eggleston (see Kumar 1992) draws an important distinction between the 'received' and the 'dynamic' perspective on curriculum. The 'received' perspective has an *a priori* view of knowledge, and does not question the legitimacy and the authenticity of knowledge while the 'dynamic' perspective negates the commonsensical unchallenging understanding of education in favouring all forms of knowledge.

This unit is based on the premise that categories like education, knowledge and truth cannot be treated as unchanging. Rather, they depend on the social context. In the course of the unit, you will come to appreciate how the delineation of these categories changes according to the power structure prevalent in society. The important question here is not what should be taught to children so that they qualify to be called educated. Studies that do not consider curricular knowledge to be neutral fall under the purview of the sociology of knowledge. In the sociology of knowledge, to understand why a particular kind of knowledge is considered relevant in the syllabus as compared to the other one, social scientists look at the interests that are served by its inclusion. They also see the social group deriving benefit from the inclusion of a particular form of knowledge. Here we seek to unravel the economic, political and cultural reasons to provide sociological understanding of knowledge. This unit provides a sociological understanding of 'knowledge' and 'power'. Some of the crucial questions at this juncture are why in a particular society a specific kind of knowledge is considered worth acquiring? Why certain kinds of knowledge are selected while other kinds of knowledge are eliminated? What are the principles of this selection and elimination, and who decides

which knowledge deserves more representation in the texts? To develop a fuller understanding of the issue, we will look at the political nature of education, and how educational institutions play an active role in perpetuating inequality in society.

5.2 Content of Education: What is Worth Knowing?

Sociology of education does not deal with the idea of 'truth' or 'true knowledge' as there is nothing like true, absolute, eternal knowledge which remains the same in all time periods and in all the societies. It deals with what is perceived as knowledge in a given social milieu. At the outset, Krishna Kumar (1992) raises the basic question of what counts as knowledge. What is the knowledge that is considered to be worthwhile, enough to be imparted through educational curriculum? For him, the knowledge that is imparted through school texts is not naturally sacrosanct, for it acquires importance because of prevailing power structures. It is pertinent to note that whatever counts as knowledge in a particular social milieu is through an act of deliberation. The process of treating one kind of knowledge as valid and worth acquiring at the expense of some other kind of knowledge is not a natural or rational one, neither is it determined by the intrinsic worth of that knowledge. The process of selection of one kind of knowledge and the elimination of another kind is consciously done in order to favour one section of the society at the expense of other. As Kumar (1992:8) puts, "What counts as knowledge is a reconstruction, based on the selection made under given social circumstances". The process of selection does not happen in a vacuum, but takes place in a social context, for the benefit of one group. The knowledge and the education which constitute the curriculum in schools are constructed by a few educated elites.

The two important processes through which a particular kind of knowledge is assigned importance are selection and representation. Out of the total body of knowledge only a part is selected for dissemination. The selection of this portion of knowledge is contingent on social processes and social relations. It is largely guided by the power structure of society. The knowledge that we finally get cannot be seen as irrespective of the social, political and economic facets of society. When we study knowledge in the context of these social, political and economic realms, only then can we understand the intricate relationship between power and knowledge.

The knowledge that is identified as 'valid' depends on the power dynamics. Economic opportunities play a determining role in defining knowledge and skills. The production of certain knowledge is not an inadvertent educational process. It is a part of the process of gaining wider control exercised on the masses. The Indian Civil Service in the twentieth century, for instance, was a product of a colonial project. Similarly, the emphasis on English and science served as a means for colonizing India. The British used education to colonize Indians under the pretext of civilizing them. This project of civilizing and controlling the masses continued even after Independence. For Kumar, before Independence, 'enlightened outsiders' were controlling natives, while after Independence 'educated Indians' were controlling their own masses. The system of education is known to operate under the influence of the economy, politics and culture and then determines which knowledge is worth disseminating out of all.

We have already made the point that in our educational curriculum the selection of any particular knowledge is not based on its intrinsic worth. Educational institutions cannot be seen as a neutral, secluded enterprise of society. There are various economic, political, and cultural reasons because of which particular forms of knowledge are selected. Economic factors determine the utility of knowledge in the present day. Knowledge itself plays an important role in the

economy of society. It stands between the family and the job market. It prepares and equips students to secure economic rewards. As the economic rewards that come in life are largely dependent on these educational institutions, social meanings, cultural capital and technical knowledge are differentially distributed by the educational institutions regardless of their ostensible democratic mission. The knowledge which is likely to provide well-paying jobs is always in high demand. Such technical knowledge is often highly inaccessible also. It becomes difficult for common people to be in command of the specialized knowledge and skill set. The privileged and the inaccessible nature of these jobs is maintained deliberately by the dominant segments of society. This legitimates, authenticates, and naturalizes the power of a few over the large mass. People having these skills and command over such knowledge finally get higher jobs that further increases their power. It is through this knowledge that they maintain their power in society. On this basis it can be established that the nature and distribution of knowledge indicates the availability of opportunities in society. The knowledge as well as the linguistic and cultural competencies of the elite are associated with highly paid and inaccessible jobs. It is important to study what knowledge is being accorded high status in our society and its cultural and economic implications. Certain knowledge is inaccessible and, because of this, schooling becomes effective in generating and perpetuating inequality.

5.3 Perpetuation of Inequality through Education

Education seems to promise a bright future, widen horizons and ensure mobility. The common sense understanding of schools perceives them as democratic, liberal institutions, committed to make social progress. It would be fallacious to assume that the school curriculum imparts neutral knowledge. Education enhances the inequalities existing in an already unequal and stratified society. Education as we have mentioned earlier is entrenched in the wider web of social and political relations that guide it. The sociology of education looks at the relationship of education with the economic, political and cultural power. It unravels the power politics and various contestations that occur in the field of education. Apple (2004) argues that close relationship exists among those who have economic, political and cultural power in the society and the ways and means in which education is thought about, organized and evaluated.

Apple (2004) and others challenge the following basic assumptions of education processes: (i) the selection processes are neutral; (ii) schools actually focus on the 'ability'; and (iii) schools teach technical curricular skills and impart information to all students unequivocally so that they all stand an equal chance to compete for economic rewards. They uphold that the wider aim of schooling is not the dissemination of the same kinds of skills to everyone. Educational processes lead to the perpetuation of the unequal social order existing in society. Apple (2004:60) remarks, "Schools have a history and that they are linked through their everyday practices to other powerful institutions in ways that are often hidden and complex." Schools, therefore, cannot be taken in isolation, having their own existence, working for the upliftment of people. Schools are situated in the larger context and are influenced by other powerful institutions in society. The educational institutions are caught up in a nexus of other institutions, that are political, economic, and cultural, and the nature of these institutions is unequal. Schools are related to these powerful institutions because of which "they generate structural inequalities of power and access to resources" (Apple 2004:61). Inequalities are reinforced and reproduced through the educational curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluative activities. The dispositions and the attitudes that are developed among students are not neutral. Rather, they are selected, represented, and organized in accordance with the powerful institutions of that historical time period. These are the effective mechanisms of social control.

The distribution of power in society between various social groups determines the distribution of knowledge. Apple (2004) raises an important question, 'Whose knowledge is of most worth?' For him the question, 'what knowledge is of most worth?' is related with 'whose knowledge?' and 'whose culture?' Radical thinkers like Apple assert that the knowledge and the skills associated with the dominant groups acquire greater significance than those of the subordinate groups. The representation of knowledge in the educational curriculum is clearly biased.

Education is used as a means through which power is exercised. Dominant groups of society use education to exercise their control. The biased selection of knowledge followed by the deliberate representation favours the powerful sections of society which ensures the subtle control of masses through the educational curriculum. Such control happens in the area of education that makes the power of the dominant groups legitimate and extremely difficult to challenge. Kumar (1992:2) refers this as 'quiet, civilized dynamic dominance.' Education becomes the agency for maintaining social hierarchies in society. The dominant social groups of society sustain and further perpetuate their power by making their knowledge and skills highly exclusive. It becomes the prerogative of only a few elite people to possess such highly privileged knowledge. This becomes the major means for dominant groups of society to maintain their power.

Apple (2004) suggests that certain knowledge, especially the most prestigious one in schools, can have some linkages with economic reproduction. These linkages are unraveled when we go back to our original questions of what is worth knowing and whose knowledge does our educational institutions disseminate? The 'policing' actions of the powerful decide which knowledge and which academic enquiry could be considered legitimate. They control or sift knowledge before it is made available to the masses. The knowledge which is finally disseminated and received by the people gets the approval of the dominant and serves their interests. The dominant sections of the society decide what is taken as knowledge and determine its accessibility to the masses. Apple (2004:34) quotes Fischer in mentioning that high status knowledge 'is by definition scarce, and its scarcity is inextricably linked to its instrumentality.' It is the command of the powerful minority over this knowledge which then works to further entrench its high status, and its association with the high paying jobs. We can say that the educational institutions 'process' knowledge.

Schools give the impression that the mastery over technical knowledge and certain skills are imparted to everyone. In reality, however, educational institutions only guarantee that a specified number of students are selected for higher levels of education, and in doing so contribute to the optimization of technical knowledge needed by the economy. The people belonging to lower socio-economic strata of society are poor, and politically and culturally disenfranchised. The kind of education children of this section of society receive is completely different from the kind of education that the children of the elite section receive. The schools and the curriculum subordinate the interests of the exploited in favour of the interests of dominant classes Apple's observations suggest that schools teach different dispositions and values to different school populations. If the particular student population is from a professional and managerial class of people then the schools and their curriculum revolves around flexibility, choice, inquiry, etc. On the other hand if they belong to semi-skilled or unskilled working population then the education revolves around punctuality, neatness, habit formation, and so on. The present economic arrangements are formulated in the manner that they require some people to remain unskilled and poor. Schools make this easy by way of imparting cultural and economic values and dispositions in a differentiated manner.

Box 5.1: Education as Cultural Imperialism

"In the mercantile period of European imperialism (1500 to about 1780), formal schooling both at home and abroad was restricted almost entirely to children of the wealthy. It was consumed by an aristocracy whose children did not need it to maintain positions of power and wealth, and it was invested in by a merchant class to enable its children to become professionals and bureaucrats. Schooling for the poor - When it existed at all - was usually religious training for conversion or moral maintenance. But even in this period, formal schooling in some places helped the European to colonize the native. In Brazil, the Jesuits formed communities with schools to turn nomadic Indians into plantation labour; in Peru another group of Jesuits helped Inca nobility become intermediaries between the Spanish Vice royalty and the former Inca subjects; the schooled nobility were made responsible for assigning Indian labor to the Spanish mines and plantations and for collecting taxes. Similarly, in India, the British East India Company created Moslem colleges to elicit the cooperation of the Moslem elite. These colleges were then used to develop an elite loyal to European Values and norms.

Aside from these important exceptions, however, formal schooling was not used to incorporate people into the economic structure until capitalism began to dominate the economy. As the capitalist organization of work created a need for a new kind of society in Europe (particularly England) - a society organized around factories, shifts, wage structures, and work organized by others - schooling served to preserve the moral fabric of this society and to socialize children into it. Thus, as feudal organization broke down in Europe and later, Latin America, an institution was needed to hold things together under new and disruptive conditions Missionaries and the Catholic Church first provided schooling for the poor, and later were aided by the state" (Carnoy 1985: 210).

In India, the capitalist period witnessed a pattern of schooling which prepared the people to fit into British bureaucratic structures and in so doing gear the economy and trade in order to promote the interests of the British. Interestingly, when the British and the French occupied West Africa, the pattern of schooling prepared Africans for roles that were determined by economic relations between the two metropolises. The metropolis industrialists discouraged industrialization yet schooling (i) served as a means of controlling societal change; and (ii) provided the moral and social guideline to the people who aspired to emulate the administrators. Historical evidence suggests that on the one hand schooling in the colonies was directed to maintain colonial structures while on the other; schooling was used as an agency for colonizing people in the United States. What is more important is to note that these methods and experiences were returned to the now independent Third World (see Carnoy 1985).

In India we can see the differences in the quality of education. All the children do not get the privilege of getting quality education. The schools can be divided into two major categories— state managed schools, and privately managed schools. The former seem to be meant for the masses, while the latter for the privileged class who can afford to pay for the good education. The co-existence of the two parallel streams of schools ensures that the masses operate in a different world than the elites. From the beginning, the children of the better off live separately from the children of the poor. This ensures that the privileged, exclusive education should be the right of a few while the masses are rendered to make their own destiny. The educated elite class maintains a comfortable paradox. On the one hand, it avows the equality-oriented ideology of our education system, while on the other it tends to protect its dominant position in society. Education plays a key role in helping

them perpetuate the current inequalities in society while maintaining the liberal facade. The apt ideology of 'equality of opportunity' is used in the Indian context for perpetuating the silent, subtle suppression.

It may be stated that the distribution, selection and transmission of knowledge are always guided by power structures. Bernstein (1979) stresses that the way a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control. The parameters for measuring performance, and how performance is understood in a society, also confirm that education favours the dominant sections of society. Bernstein and Young explain that 'structuring of knowledge and symbol in our educational institutions is intimately related to the principles of social and cultural control in a society' (see Apple 2004:2). The competition based on meritocracy seems to be impartial and fair. We measure persons by their ability to generate wealth. Those who fail to do generate and accrue wealth are naturally and easily condemned to be of lower worth. Through various agencies, especially education, this has become part of our mundane thought. This common sense knowledge mystifies and naturalizes the exploitative relationship between the dominant and the subjugated groups of society. Educational institutions go hand in hand with the other economic, political and cultural forces, and provide mechanisms through which power is maintained.

Reflection and Action 5.1

Discuss the role of education in social control of the masses.

5.4 Cultural and Economic Reproduction

Education becomes the site for the reproduction and production of power relations in society. Education becomes a tool to dominate, to impose ideas, meanings and practices on people in a civilized, democratic way. This kind of oppression is subtle and is not undemocratic. Through education the dominant sections of society hegemonize the common sense making exploitation appear natural. Apple asserts that education and differential cultural, economic, and political power should be seen as closely connected with each other. The educational policies and practices are the result of struggles by powerful groups to legitimize their knowledge and their viewpoint. This authenticates the pattern of social mobility and increases their power in society.

Based on a study of the schooling in American society, Bowles and Gintis (see Apple 2004) stress the economic role of educational institutions. They mention that educational institutions play a paramount role in reproducing the division of labour in society, sustaining class divisions. For this reason Apple (2004) explores the relationship between economic and cultural domination because of which inequality in society is reproduced. He mentions that one of the important ways through which dominant groups are able to exert their power is through the control of the governmental mechanisms that grant official legitimacy to particular groups' knowledge. One such way is through the process of state textbook adoption. Textbooks are an important medium for exercising control as they embody dominant ideologies. In textbooks knowledge continues to be inherently ideological as it reproduces the culture of dominant class and perpetuates the established patterns of social order and social inequality. These biased textbooks allow the hegemony of dominant groups to continue, and the hierarchical social order is preserved. Timothy Scrase in his examination of the textbooks of West Bengal finds that the texts and the images are ideologically biased. He places the characters and the stories on the dimensions of time and space, and finds that while upper caste occupations are identified more with the present, those of the lower castes are related with the past. This reinforces the notion of lower castes' closeness with technological

backwardness and social irrelevance. The children of the lower castes are disadvantaged as their own cultural experiences are denied the legitimation of being real and valued knowledge. Texts either do not represent the experiences of lower caste people and if they do represent, then it is in a distorted form. Whenever the lower castes have attempted to challenge the established hierarchical order, they have been demeaned and ridiculed on ideological and cultural grounds. Dominant groups use knowledge in a way that no voices other than their own are represented. If they get represented, then only in a feeble, inadequate or distorted way, which gives them a negative appeal. This is a civilized, dynamic form of assertion through which the dominant ideology continues to perpetuate its domination.

Box 5.2: Banking Concept of Education

“Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and ‘makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits... pp. 45-46.

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result in their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

The capacity of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their ‘humanitarianism’ to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but is always seeking out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another” pp 47 (Freire 1972).

The schools disseminate certain forms of knowledge through which people can be controlled. They not just control people, but they also control meaning. Both of them influence each other. Schools disseminate ‘legitimate knowledge’, the knowledge of specific groups, under the illusion of belonging to everyone. Just the fact that the particular knowledge is provided and distributed by the school gives legitimacy to that knowledge and to that particular group also which feels close to that knowledge. In this way it becomes easy to control people by controlling meaning. The group getting substantial representation in the curriculum should have the political and economic power to make their knowledge, their life-world, and their world-view into ‘knowledge for all’. Culture and cultural capital are also used for this and cannot be seen as apolitical entities. Therefore, power and culture are interwoven and mutually influence each other so that both economic power and cultural power give better agencies for social control.

Foucault provides an analysis of knowledge and finds the complex relationship existing between forms of knowledge and relations of power. He finds a circular relationship between the systems of power and regimes of knowledge. Through knowledge, control is exercised and order is imposed. This is the dialectic of knowledge and control. John Fiske also shares the same critical Foucauldian thought. For him, “Knowledge is never neutral, it never exists in an empiricist, objective relationship to the real. Knowledge is power, and the circulation of knowledge is part of the social distribution of power” (from Apple 2000:143).

The education and power linkage becomes vivid when the deliberate selection and organization of knowledge is studied critically. Selective tradition, ideology and hegemony are three critical terms used by Apple (2004) for his analysis. Let us understand these terms here. The deliberate selection of knowledge in any text allows social control and social inequality to continue. Williams calls this selection as 'selective tradition', and defines it as, 'someone's selection, someone's vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one group's cultural capital disenfranchises another's.' Through the process of 'selective tradition,' educational curriculum acts as agents of both cultural and ideological control. It legitimates, naturalizes and authenticates the culture and knowledge of the dominant groups.

Ideology refers to the system of ideas, beliefs, or values about the social reality. But this is a simplistic way of understanding it. Marx explains ideology as a form of false consciousness which distorts one's picture of social reality and serves the interests of the dominant classes in a society. It provides a justification of their vested interests and gives them a liberal ostensible appearance. To understand what ideology is, one has to investigate what is considered to be legitimate knowledge in specific institutions at specific historical moments. For Apple (2004:43) "The overt and covert knowledge found within school settings, and the principles of selection, organization, and evaluation of this knowledge, are value governed selections from a much larger universe of possible knowledge and selection principles". Hence whatever schools teach as accurate knowledge and as representing collective tradition is, in effect, the life world of only a few. Through the overt and the hidden curricula it is the meanings and the life worlds of the dominant in society which are being collected and distributed. Not all groups' visions and meanings are represented, and this becomes possible through ideology.

Hegemony saturates our consciousness so that the educational, economic and social reality we see and interact with seems to be the only one. It refers to those organized assemblage of meanings, values and actions that are adhered to in the course of life. It is through hegemony that the control over people, resources becomes smooth. For Williams (from Apple 2004:4), schools become agents of cultural and ideological hegemony. Education may be viewed as a hegemonic form, because its ideological saturation permeates our lived experience, and enables them to believe they are neutral participants in the neutral instrumentation of schooling. On the contrary they serve the economic and ideological interests of the popular and elite culture.

Young (see Apple 2004) mentions that schools not only 'process people' they 'process knowledge' as well. The educational institutions, among others, play the most important role in disseminating the dominant culture and in legitimizing, and naturalizing power. They shape people's attitudes and ideas and prepare them in a way that they see no alternative to the meanings, cultures and interpretations provided by the educational institutions. Schools disseminate both, formal knowledge as well as the linguistic and social competencies, differentially to different students based on their power in society. These competencies are equally required today to get higher salaried and higher status jobs. The knowledge which gets selected and organized in the curriculum pertains to both economic property and symbolic property, i.e. cultural capital. Schools play an active role in preserving and distributing both of them. Bourdieu treats cultural capital as economic capital. Just as the people who are endowed with economic capital do better, those who hold cultural capital are at an advantage. Cultural capital is unequally distributed and is dependent on the division of labour in society. The selection process occurring in society largely depends on the cultural capital. He argues that it is through the seemingly neutral process of selection and instruction that filtering and the divisions of students begin from their early years. Schools take the cultural capital, the

habitus of the middle class, as natural and employ it on all the children. However, "by taking all children as equal, while implicitly favouring those who have already acquired the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle-class culture, schools take as natural what is essentially a social gift, i.e. cultural capital" (Apple 2004:31). Cultural capital then becomes an effective filtering device in the reproduction of a hierarchical society. Apple (2004:48) writes, "Just as there is a social distribution of cultural capital in society, so too is there a social distribution of knowledge within classrooms."

Educational institutions contribute to inequality by differentially distributing specific kinds of knowledge to different social groups. They 'process' people in accordance with their economic and cultural capital and increase societal inequality. Hidden curriculum is 'the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years' (Apple 2004:13). It maintains the ideological hegemony of the dominant classes in society. During the socialization process the child internalizes the rules required to govern the social order. This ideological saturation starts very early in one's life. Apple makes the point that the economically rooted norms and dispositions are actually taught in institutions of cultural preservation and distribution like schools.

Young explains that there is 'a dialectical relationship between access to power and the opportunity to legitimize certain dominant categories, and processes by which the availability of such categories to some groups enables them to assert power and control over others' (from Apple 2004:30). Inequality in society is sustained and propagated by the 'transmission' of a particular kind of culture. Educational institutions play an important role in cultural and economic reproduction. Educational institutions play a pertinent role as they have a major role in legitimizing and accepting inequalities, and in maintaining hegemony. The way economic capital is unequally distributed holds true for cultural capital also. Schools distribute this cultural capital, and become an important agent in providing legitimacy to categories and forms of knowledge. It is fallacious to assume school curriculum imparts neutral knowledge. Legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among class, caste, gender and religious groups. Apple (2000:144) writes 'Thus, education and power are terms of an indissoluble couplet.' Texts cannot be treated as a simple conglomeration of facts that are presented in a systematically printed form. The controversy over 'legitimate knowledge' or 'official knowledge' in the school texts center around what is to be included or excluded in the text.

In the educational curriculum, the knowledge being counted as valid gets that status through a conscious process of selection. The processes that make any knowledge valid are selection, representation, distribution and reception and are influenced by the economy, politics and culture. It is through these processes only that inequality is perpetuated in society. A complex relationship exists between educational policy and practice and the relations of domination and exploitation of the larger society. It is important to understand the contradictory power relationships that exist at the site of education to assert and to reassert dominant groups' meanings, their representations and their voices.

Williams finds educational institutions making incorporation possible that plays a significant role in maintaining and perpetuating inequality in society. He explains, "The educational institutions are usually the main agencies of transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic and cultural activity...the selective tradition: that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as 'the tradition,' the

significant past. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. The more crucial point is here that some of these meanings are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture” (see Apple 2004:5). This ensures total incorporation in the unequal social order. He rightly depicts the role of hegemony, because of which the role of educational institutions in reproducing the inequalities goes unchallenged. The reaction is neutral or it supports the mainstream tradition as the ruling ideology is not imposed. If only the dominant culture has been represented then overcoming it, challenging it must have been easy. Williams points out that meanings and forms are reinterpreted to suit the dominant culture, thereby leaving no room for resistance to spring up. The resistance is this process if co-opted.

We need to understand that the processes through which perspectives and ideas of one group are given more value than the other(s) make the former group more powerful than the latter. This politics of knowledge, Apple (2000) avers, is the politics of compromises. Dominant sections of society do not use physical force, or direct impositions to make their world view legitimate. They assert their power by co-opting the different and the divergent views in the educational curriculum, though subsequently it favours their section of the society only. For instance the educational curriculum does not omit the knowledge of the dominated sections, as that can make the exploitation clear. The curriculum reflects them also but in a feeble way, disenfranchising them or positioning them under the patronage of the powerful sections. Education, for this reason, is a powerful medium as it legitimizes and naturalizes the power. These compromises give it a democratic façade, thereby increasing its authenticity, and they occur at the level of political and ideological discourse. The knowledge that is taught in schools, the pedagogic practices that teachers adopt, the teaching-learning processes that happen in class, the curriculum are a few sites of struggle. Constant struggle for voices, representations happen over curriculum, teaching and policy. They are the result of various political, cultural and economic activities, struggles and compromises. The textbooks, when studied critically, reflect the priorities of various groups. They signify the selection and organization of knowledge. These educational processes are always the results of such compromises where dominant groups in order to maintain their dominance take the concerns of the less powerful. This becomes an effective strategy of co-opting the dissident voices so that the cultural and economic reproduction of inequality continues.

Reflection and Action 5.2

‘Education is subservient to the political system.’ Discuss.

5.5 Conclusion

In this Unit we have made the point that what happens inside the educational institutions is intricately linked to economic, social, and ideological structures outside it. The educational institutions, their policies and the processes are connected to specific economic and political structures. By serving the interests of the dominant sections of society they contribute to the societal inequality and also help these sections in maintaining the social order in their favour. They are able to do that through formal knowledge as well as the dispositions (i.e. cultural capital) that are learned in such institutions. This ‘formal corpus of school knowledge’ becomes a form of social and economic control. Through the overt and the hidden curricula, schools play an important role in selecting, preserving, and fostering the conceptions of competence, ideological norms, dos and don’ts, status of knowledge and values. Control over knowledge

increases the ideological dominance of one group over another. We have made the point that knowledge is constructed and it reproduces the status quo. The knowledge is used to legitimize the operation of power in society.

5.6 Further Reading

Apple, Michael W. 2004. *Ideology and Curriculum*. Routledge

Fieire, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. England: Penguin Books

Kumar, Krishna. 1992. *What is Worth Teaching?* New Delhi: Orient Longman