Developing a Marxian approach to education research in ‘new times’
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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its aftermath, the ascendancy of a rampant capitalist market economy, has had at least two consequences for education. It has led to the increasing infiltration of market forces into the public education arena and those independent systems which have until now not subscribed to an enterprise model. It has also affected the intellectual research climate in which Marxist theories including those relating to educational research tends to be derided and depoliticised. This is how I interpret the education scene in new times.

The effects of recent policy and structural changes in education have become concentrated on teachers whose work is becoming more like a tightrope juggling act as teachers try to accommodate the contradictory demands that are now placed on them under working conditions which are constantly being eroded. This situation has become the point of departure for my investigation into teachers’ work in Australian Catholic schools.

This study called for a Marxian approach but I soon discovered that there were few guidelines in a readily accessible form that could facilitate my developing such a method appropriate to my critical inquiry. There is a paucity of studies dedicated to the exploration and development of the Marxian method, a situation that has been exacerbated by the schism between the Marxisms of East and West. The difficulty lies in coming to grips with a method that, unlike mainstream research methods, does not apply predetermined formulas to the object of study. Rather its ‘object’ becomes its subject and the method takes on a dynamic productive role as immanent critique. A useful path into the complexity of a Marxian method is to appreciate the significance of the organic paradigm and the notion of human subjectivity. This understanding also has the added benefit of freeing the researcher from dependence on Marx’s original work as if it were ‘holy writ’ and allowing for development of the method. Marx’s project in any case remains incomplete.

In this account I will follow the logic of the Marxian method in grasping the structure and tracing the development of the subject, namely the Marxian method, with a view to setting up a paradigm as a ‘guiding thread’. This means I must begin with the conditions and issues that led to its emergence. There follows an exposition of the principles of the Marxian method from the perspective of the organic paradigm and notions of human subjectivity followed by an outline of the method’s process of inquiry. The account concludes with the implications for education and education research and its application for the study of teachers’ work in Australian Catholic schools.

The Marxian Method

Origins

The Marxian method has its roots in the issues that arose in the 17th and 18th centuries concerning the new humanism. For the first time in history economic, scientific and technological conditions had made it possible for human beings to contemplate themselves as autonomous self-determining subjects in relation to a reified or objectified world which they could control and manipulate. No longer were they confined to the dictates of a cosmic order which had given meaning to the world and their place in it. They could, it seemed at the time, live in a world which they themselves created (Berlin 1965, p.47). In consequence it left the old social structures without justification (Taylor 1975, p.547).

By the end of the 18th century, however, the sense of freedom that accompanied this possibility was tempered by the reality of the increasing impoverishment and social dislocation suffered by the majority of the population as well as the excesses that followed the French revolution.

The Organic Vision of reality

This radical shift in anthropological vision posed two problems: how might a new way of life be worked out which reflected these new possibilities, and how might the relations between the self-determining subject and his or her relations to the world be conceptualised and given practical realisation. It further raised the epistemological question of how knowledge could be validated when reference to an external authority no longer applied.
Two visions of reality emerged in response to these issues. The first I will term the instrumental paradigm derived from the ideas of radical Enlightenment thinkers such as Condillac, Helvétius and La Mettrie (Berlin 1956, p.19), and the second in reaction to the first, the organic paradigm, notions of which began to be expressed about the same time by thinkers such as Diderot.

The instrumental paradigm was based on a conception of the world as a mechanical aggregate of elements or atoms without intrinsic connection with each other. In condemning the inhumanity of the existing order, the extreme Enlightenment thinkers saw in this mechanical view of the world something that could be controlled and constructed to reflect the needs and aspirations of the autonomous subject. All evils, it was thought, could be cured by appropriate technological means based on the positive scientific method of inquiry. This ability was regarded as an affirmation of the human subject’s essential freedom. Unfortunately, because the human subject was also part of objectified nature she or he also came under the purview of science as an object. This instrumental and dualistic view of human subjectivity and his or her relations to the world brought a reaction from the Romantics and German idealist philosophers, notably Herder and Kant, who posed an alternative vision based on the organic paradigm. They saw the instrumental vision as arupturing of the organic unity that constituted life and nature. Herder, for instance in his theory of expression, conceived human beings and their activities not in terms of subject-object but holistically in the sense of artistic self-expression. The unfolding of their potentiality towards self-realisation as freely developing beings in union within themselves, with others and with nature Herder saw as the expression of who human subjects were creating themselves to be (Taylor 1975, p.13ff).

This idea of organic human subjectivity was complemented by Immanuel Kant’s notion of rational moral autonomy that he held to be intrinsic to the nature of the human subject, a consciousness of duty that was independent both of external authority and of the inclinations of the self as part of nature. This presupposes freedom from external authority and nature (Mar’as 1967, p.294-5). In the conceptualisation of human subjectivity these were powerful ideas since they seemed to express what was essentially human.

For the predominantly German intellectuals these two notions exerted a powerful influence but posed a problem for a holistic view of human subjectivity because the two ideas in fact opposed each other. The freedom of Kant’s subject as a self-determining moral will was only possible at the cost of a struggle against his or her inclinations in response to the imperatives of her or his nature. What makes rational autonomy possible, that is embodiment, is also its limit. Human rationality and nature are also divided because the faculty of reason limits and defines whereas sentience seeks union with the unbounded creative dynamic that underlies life and nature.

The Problem of knowledge

The new anthropology also raised epistemological issues which required fresh conceptualisation. The approach derived from the instrumental paradigm was to apply the mathematical method of inquiry to all areas of life and thought because it had proved so successful in the creation of scientific and technological knowledge. Its techniques of ‘deduction from “self-evident” axioms according to fixed rules, tests of internal consistency, a priori methods’ and its standards of clarity and rigour became the standard investigative procedure even being applied to questions of philosophy (Berlin 1956, p.14). Measurability became the new criterion for establishing validity. That which could not be measured, for example human subjective thought and feeling, was rejected on the grounds of unreliability in matters of verifiability (Berlin 1956, p.17).

The organic approach to epistemological issues cut across the certainty that the instrumental method seemed to offer. The question was how to conceptualise a developing rational human organism in an equally developing world with any degree of certainty that the conceptualisation coincided with reality particularly as organic development must involve contradiction and tension and as the individual performing the conceptualisation was him- or herself a rational human organism. Hegel was the first to work out a dynamic but at the same time holistic conception of the human subject and her or his relations to the world which sought to resolve the contradictions between reason and nature. The solution lay in a logic that took contradiction as a given reality, and although he criticised Hegel’s metaphysical principles, Marx nevertheless retained this rational element of Hegel’s solution.

Hegel’s proposal was ingenious. Rather than concentrate on the idea of a creator-designer in the sense of an artist creating a work of art, he focussed on making the design process itself as the self-generating subject.
Organic Paradigm
Principles
While references which testify to an underlying organic paradigm are scattered throughout the works of Hegel and Marx-examples can be found in Hegel’s Logic (Hegel 1975, pp.20-21) and in Capital (Marx 1954, pp.8-10, 18-20)-few Marxist scholars have ventured to explore its significance in the conceptualisation of rational human subjectivity either by Hegel or Marx.

In conceptualising his notion of Geist, that is mind or spirit, as rational subject, Hegel finds in Kant’s idea of a self-organised being an appropriate organic paradigm (Hegel 1929 p.377ff; Hegel 1975, p.88; Wood, 1981, p.192).

Organic paradigm: Structure
Kant (1952, p.19-24) finds that what distinguishes a biological organism from a mere mechanical device is its structural relations within which its capacity to develop is generated. The nature of the relations between the organism as a totality of parts and those parts is one of reciprocity so that each of the parts and the whole is what it is on account of this relationship. Each part exists through the agency of its counterparts and is conditioned by them. Furthermore, the parts are hierarchically ordered (Rader 1979, p.75) according to the degree of their importance in the maintenance of the whole organism. This does not belittle the role of the subordinate parts because they have importance in constituting the conditions under which the dominant parts exist and operate. Hegel’s conception of the master-slave relation and Marx’s capital-labour relation can be interpreted in this light.

Characteristic of the whole and each of its parts is a self-sufficiency in generating its own maturation and reproduction. This implies the possession of a simple kind of agency in embryonic form in maintaining its form, adapting to external circumstance and a purpose directed towards a final goal. This indicates two modes of development, one that is derived from the organism’s inner necessity to preserve its identity as well as mature and realise its potentiality, and the other as the outer necessity that takes account of changing conditions. There are epistemological implications in this concept. The idea of a self-organised being cannot be captured from empirical observation alone. It requires a theory that conceives reality in terms of an organic whole, allowing its structural patterning to be grasped as dialectically related and its development to be traced. When conceived as structured wholes and elements of larger wholes organised beings exhibit their essential natures and their characteristic tendencies to self-maintenance and equilibrium; to develop their natures overtime by continually changing and revolutionizing their organic structures, structures which are predisposed to unfold ‘a certain abstract essence or basic principle towards its full concreteness’ (Wood 1981, p.208). An understanding on a basis of organised being of this kind Hegel and Marx built their theories of society and history will facilitate the working out of a Marxian method for a specific line of inquiry.

Organic paradigm: Development
This organic paradigm did not, however take account of human rationality. Kant’s organic paradigm appealed to Hegel in solving the problem of reconciling the contradictory elements of human reason and nature, and it had possibilities for his notion of Geist as rational subjectivity.

Account of a self-conscious autonomous human subject could be made if agency were seen in evolutionary terms reaching its apex in rational human subjectivity. This human subject on account of his or her rationality is qualitatively different. A living organism, on the other hand, is limited to natural life and does not of itself have the capacity to proceed beyond the maturation and self-maintenance of its structure. Self-consciousness, however, has enabled the human organism to proceed beyond this limitation and overthrow and transform its structure (Wood 1981, p.195). It is this quality to develop through consciousness which separates human beings from other living organisms. For Hegel rationality as Geist is the generative principle which seeks self-conscious realisation beyond the hierarchy of forms of life extending to hierarchical modes of cultural expression such as language, art, religion and philosophy according to how adequately they express the subject’s rationality and freedom. Human history for Hegel is, therefore, ‘the ascent up a ladder of cultural forms’ (Taylor 1975, pp.83, 85).
While rationality in Hegel’s schema is the universal creative force, it must exist in embodied form. This ontological necessity poses a limit and therefore frustrates the freedom that unbounded rationality requires. The same contradiction applies to human subjects. The necessary conditions for their existence are in conflict with their teleological drive towards full rational autonomy. Their ontological necessity is in contradiction with their goal. In other words embodiment as nature is in conflict with reason. Hegel sees a resolution of this if human subjects can recognise that nature itself is part of a rational plan. To accomplish this realisation, however, they must objectify their embodied selves to see that they are part of nature and also part of the larger rational plan underlying the whole, a rationality which is Geist (Taylor 1975, p.86). Geist becomes the exemplar of the rationality which Hegel holds underlies and manifests itself in the details of the universe, the spirit flowing through everything. The universe is Geist’s necessary embodiment which Geist posits as the condition of its existence. Geist, as I have pointed out, is not an external designer but the design of the universe is its own expression (Taylor 1975, p.88). To attain full awareness, however, Geist or cosmic spirit can only do so through the vehicles of rational finite spirits, that is human subjects. Hegel sees in the pattern of development towards total self-consciousness not as a single movement but as a series of stages characterised by contradictions that arise when the existing forms of Geist’s own making are found to be inadequate and so limiting in its drive towards self-realisation. The forms that Geist adopts successively fetter its progress. These forms must in turn be dissolved but at the same time preserved in the new more adequate forms that follow.

This is the process towards total rational self-recognition of the fact that the forms Geist creates in order to exist are indeed its own self. This realisation for Hegel is the absolute, the whole, totality, infinity, a concept which promises the reconciliation of reason and nature. The whole encapsulates polar opposites which is the unity of opposites that Hegel’s speaks of. It encapsulates Geist, the rational boundless dynamic and its necessary embodiment, the finite forms of human subjects and other details of the universe which manifest self-fulfilling activity. This fulfilment amounts to Geist’s recognition that its opposites, finite forms, are in fact its own other. In the act of positing or deploying itself Geist becomes embodied which then constitutes the medium through which it achieves its goal of actualisation. Thus Hegel declares ‘the True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence [dynamic] consummating itself through its development’ (Hegel 1977, p.11). Geist’s developmental journey is not a linear progression but a spiral of ever increasingly enriching ‘moments’ towards the perfect union of consciousness and reality, a progression which having reached the end turns in on itself circular fashion to begin the cycle afresh. Hegel conceptualises this movement of the absolute as the unity of unity and difference where in order to achieve the unity of self-conscious actuality Geist must separate itself so as to become an object for its own reflection. This means in effect that as object it becomes its opposite, its difference. The realisation that the object or other is itself, however, dissolves the negation that this difference represents but at the same time it must be preserve with the former unity in order to attain a new more adequate concept of self. Not to apprehend this relation results in only a partial and, therefore, inadequate view. The objectification process in effect constitutes the negation of the original unity and this for Hegel is the essence of the dialectical process.

Hegel represents this movement in his Logic as a hierarchy of successively more adequate concepts of reality ‘each of which is a closer approximation to the truth than the one out of which it is generated’ (Wood 1981, p. 197-198). This is a process of moving from an abstract notion in which a category appears in mere outline towards an increasingly concrete notion which ultimately becomes a totality of both unity and difference.

While Marx is heir to the idealist philosophical principles concerning a humanism based on the organic model of subjectivity and accepts Hegel’s vision of reality as organically structured, nevertheless he vehemently criticises the universal and abstract terms in which it was presented.

What Marx rejected was Hegel’s metaphysical presupposition that the organic structure of reality and its observable development constituted and was the expression of the self-posting activity of Geist, a vision of reality which could only be known by means of a priori speculative principles. Marx postulated that the ideal, that is thought, was not the dynamic of the real world, rather ‘the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected in the human mind, and translated into forms of thought’ (Marx 1954, p.29). It is on this point that Marx’s method differs from that of Hegel’s. Furthermore, in Hegel’s schema there is no practical role for the human subject as agent. The human subject can only speculate on a drama that has essentially taken place and therefore can take no active role in change and development. This is what Marx’s is referring to in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. By accepting that existing society is the deed of the idea, Hegel takes society as a given and assumes
that it is rational (Wood 1981, p.212). Marx accepts the dialectical structure of the world but one that displays the inherent characteristics of material reality. This means that conceiving the structure of the world dialectically only reflects what actually is its nature. The best way to mirror this reality is a dialectical theory which: one, views its subject matter organically; two, traces its hierarchical stages of development in achieving concrete realisation; and three, explains how changes in structure occur as a result of its inherent tendencies to develop (Wood 1981, p.208).

History as a sign of developmental processes for Marx is not the manifestation of a universal self-positing spirit. Rather it is the result of real human beings employing their productive capacity under specific social organisations to fulfil their subsistence and cultural needs. On seeking the dynamic of social change in the material conditions of his society Marx concentrated his considerable energy to analysing capitalist society, a project which began with his brief encounter where as a journalist actual social conditions seemed at odds with the ideal that Hegel was proposing. For Hegel Geist’s self-realisation had reached near perfection in the form of the German state. Marx thus came to focus his inquiries on what he came to label the capitalist mode of production which he saw, in accord with his organic vision, as a specific and negative ‘moment’ in history, to be eventually superseded as it strives to resolve its contradictions and crises.

For Marx the formative power of capitalism derives not from a universal rational life force but from the creative productive power of human subjects which operates with the necessary conditions of a specifically capitalist formation of social relations characterised by alienation, exploration and division.

This kind of social relations has its source in the social divisions arising from the private property arrangements which allowed the emerging bourgeois or capitalist class, in order to accumulate capital, to gain control over and own the means of production to which the working class were deprived access. This left the latter only their productive power with which to maintain their subsistence. It was a power, however, which the capitalist class sought as the source of their profit-making gained through the surplus value produced in the labour process.

This becomes the essential antagonism between capital and labour, a relationship which is mediated by market exchange relations. As Marx analyses these relations, he demonstrates that surplus value is accrued as a result of the difference between the price paid in the market place by the capitalist to the worker for his or her productive power to be put to work in the capitalist’s interests for a set time and its cost to the capitalist as a means of production. The worker is under the impression that the wage he receives covers the total time for which he is contracted, but for the capitalist this wage is a cost that covers only part of that time. The balance of time worked accrues as surplus value, something which the market relation conceals. Marx sees this antagonism played out in organic terms. The capitalist forces of production, the immanent operative dynamic of which is workers’ productive capacity, are in conflict with the necessary capitalist formation of relations of production. These are a necessary condition for the drive towards ever increasing capital accumulation. The capitalist mode of production and its social relations including the productive and the superstructural elements constitute a totality. The structural dynamics of the totality resides in the capital-wage labour relation which is mediated by embodied labour power. Under capitalism, however, while this labour power in embodied form belongs to the worker, in its dynamic mode it becomes the property of the capitalist for a set period.

In the totality of productive relations crises and change arise because the formation of capitalist social relations become outmoded in time and fetter the advance of the dynamic that lies in the forces of production. In a Marxian analysis the worker is the subject because in him or her resides embodied the dynamic that maintains the capitalist mode of production. From the perspective or an organic paradigm it becomes clear how Marx conceives the eventual demise of capitalism when its alienating relations of production fetter the labouring subject’s drive towards rational autonomy and self-expression.

Dialectical Method

We can now begin to draw up a paradigm of the dialectical method which will be a composite of Hegel’s universal dialectical principles and their adaptation by Marx to a specific set of material circumstances, namely capitalism at its stage of development in the mid nineteenth century. Together, the universal features of Hegel and the particulars of Marx, seem to suggest a totality of method. The task of method for Hegel is to disclose the self-positing activity of Geist through the human subject’s activity of thought. It requires getting a picture how thought mediates human experience in ways that
‘determine the character of that experience in its differing shapes, grades and orders (Hegel 1951, p.14-15).

A concept must carry not only the definition of the object of experience, as this would only describe its appearance, it must also explain the object’s essential nature or essence. This makes an initial definition pointless and an abstraction until its full inner details are revealed. A definition can only be stated after the human subject has moved from the abstract concept to the concrete whole by means of a method that involves critical reflection. This process of conceptual abstraction to concrete realisation constitutes the content of Hegel’s works on Logic, one that is expressed in his axiom, the unity or identity of identity and difference.

Method, according to Hegel, is the dynamic of reason and therefore Geist’s self-positing movement (Hegel 1929, p.468-469). It is the dynamic of consciousness as subject a complete or absolute conception of reality where the goal is the coincidence of reality in itself. This ideal, of course, cannot be achieved by the finite human subject who nevertheless continually seeks ever closer approximations in the thinking process.

In grasping the objects of experience and making sense of them, the mind forms generalisations or broad outlines of these objects. This first ‘moment’ elicits only abstract concepts as outlines only without content which must be exemplified in reality to achieve full actualisation (Wood 1981, p.192). In this universal state concepts present as unity. They begin to take definite shape in reflection’s negating process of objectification. Negation dissolves this unity to disclose the web of relations that display contradictions and differences, contradictions which are the source of their immanent dynamic. It discloses the tension between what the objects are and what they are striving to become. In terms of method this negative movement is the dynamic of criticism and a formative moment in the conceptualisation process.

For Hegel the formative process that is mediated by reflection involves two movements, the objectification process, and the realisation that the external observable object of reality is emanating from essence (Taylor 1975, p.261). A holistic and therefore concrete concept of reality emerges in this realisation that the original unity and the difference are in fact a unity but one which contains both universal form and particulars of content. ‘The two processes which may appear to be different coincide and are the same. The method thus forms a circle’ (Hegel 1929, p.67). Reflection is no longer simply a reflection of external reality. It is also following the dialectical movement of the structures underlying reality.

In summary Hegel’s method consists in capturing conceptually the logical pattern of Geist’s development as it takes place through the medium of the human subject’s thought, a process which for Hegel ‘has its practical counterpart in the necessary development of human history’ (Rosen 1974, p.13). Method in this schema is the immanent force of consciousness but a consciousness which is embodies in the finite human subject. It constitutes in other words immanent critique. The process of moving from abstract to concrete is also taken up by Marx. In his comments on method in the Preface to the first German edition of Capital Vol. I Marx does not specifically refer to Hegel’s method but does make reference to an organic paradigm (Marx 1954, p.19). Nevertheless it is plain that the first three chapters on commodity in Capital Vol. I conform to Hegel’s logical paradigm. Hegel’s influence is also evident in Marx’s structuring of his intended and incomplete works on capital. Book I deals with capital in the abstract, Book II with its circulation, the various forms of its development are dealt with in Book III, and Book IV completes the process with a history of the theory (Marx 1954, p.21). A more detailed description of Marx’s method is to be found in the Grundrisse (Marx 1973).

Marx’s inquiries are focussed on the specifics of what he holds to be the necessary but inadequate social formation of capitalism. This points to an organic paradigm but it is only a ‘guiding thread’. According to Engels, the explanations which appeal to dialectical interconnections and tendencies depend ‘on the particular nature of each case’ (Wood 1981, p.199).

In the practical application method for Hegel begins with ‘Freedom of the mind ‘when the content of that which stirs the mind is drawn out of its immediate unity with the subject, and made an object for it’ (Hegel, 1951, p.45-46). This is the consciousness raising process which in Marx refers to in his experience as a journalist, a process which is an important characteristic of Marxian methods. As a consequence of this experience he determined on a ‘ruthless criticism of all that exists’ without fear as to its conclusions or the conflict it might bring about with the authorities. He then outlines his method of immanent critique. The new principles derived from such criticism, he declares, should not be presented in a doctrinaire fashion. Rather they should be developed ‘for the world out of the world’
own principles’ to assist in the raising of consciousness by reflecting back and so objectifying for the world, the meaning of its own struggles (Marx and Engels 1975, 143ff).

To this end Marx devoted the rest of his life. His chief break through came when he recognised that the source that underlay capitalism’s drive for profit was none other than commodified human labour power. To summarise it as a paradigm for a Marxian method, the acting subject begins with consciousness of contradiction and then proceeds to describe the situation and to explain its causes. This will involve first, tracing the origins of the contradiction; second, analysing its structural features in order to discover the dynamics that are operating therein; and third, tracing out the forms that development takes. This process serves to raise awareness of the operational constraints and possibilities and this knowledge serves as a springboard for positive action towards transformation and an achievable goal. This summary, of course, is by way of a pencil sketch. The Marxian method can be far more complex depending on the depth of the analysis undertaken. The decision remains with the subject of the research, the one whose productive capacities create the conditions that ensure that her or his needs are fulfilled.

A Marxian Method for Education

The antagonistic relations are, of course, carried over into those elements of the capitalist mode of production totality which Marx classifies as superstructural. These elements in terms of capital accumulation are unproductive because they constitute a cost which is not immediately redeemable in the actual process of capital accumulation (Marx, Karl 1930 #258, p.139). This provides some explanation as to the present state of education funding. On the other hand, from the perspective of the organic paradigm superstructural elements do constitute the conditions which make profit-making possible and exhibit all the features of the economic relations of production which is the dominant focus of Marx’s analysis. Furthermore, as Engels points out (Marx and Engels 1968, p.694), these elements are far from passive. ‘There is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself’. Though Marx designates the labour relations within the superstructural elements as unproductive, it might be said that teacher's labour power which is not engaged in commercial education enterprises does enter the economic base as constant capital, a concept which relates to the ‘dead’ labour that is contained in components entering the productive process as means of production (Marx 1954, Ch. VIII, p.193ff). This proposition is based on my assumption that the labour power of students is skilled by teachers and therefore has teachers’ labour power embedded in it when they submit their productive capacity to the commodity job market.

Implications for research

In terms of education research a Marxian method has a lot to offer. It not only describes the current situation but also seeks out the dynamics of change. As its underlying principles are based on the organic paradigm, it takes as given that education is intimately connected with the fortunes of the capitalist mode of production through the work of teachers.

Marx identified that change occurs when the relations of production, here including superstructural elements, do not serve the forces of production, the vital component of which is labour. From the perspective of the organic paradigm, the production relations constitute the embodiment and the conditions under which the forces of production exist and operate. In absolute terms, however, they are one and the same. In time, however, the existing relations begin to confine the dynamic which then seeks to create new relations. It would appear that we are at this point in education today.

In the education setting a Marxian method must seek out the contradictions and constraints that are imposed on the teaching situation through immanent critique, and identify the possibilities for proactive strategies that engender the realisation of rational autonomous subjects in both teachers and students. This may seem elementary but it is an essential feature of a Marxian method that it proposes both negative and positive aspects in any change process. The present situation must be seen as a negation which will inevitably dissolve and be replaced by an education system approaching Paulo Friere’s education model. It is on this basis that teachers begin to take positive action. If one subscribes to the organic paradigm, this outcome has to present a distinct possibility.
While the relations of teachers to their employer, the state, in the public education sector can be regarded in terms of a dichotomy, the relations of their colleagues in the Catholic sector to their employer, the Catholic church, can be said to constitute a trichotomy. This makes analysing their work much more complex.

The major contradiction occurs between the espoused ideals which express what Catholic schools should become in terms of cooperative and caring faith communities which model themselves on peace, justice, and Catholic morality, and the actual day-to-day reality where teachers are faced with the imperatives of education emanating from government policies to produce skilled and disciplined commodity labour power embodied in their students for a competitive workforce. The church-state relations constitute a major determining influence. The church not only requires that teachers encourage students to become adherents to its norms and practices, it must undertake under its funding arrangements to ensure the opposite, ensure that teachers conform to government policies on education. This makes the church an agent of the state and ultimately capital..

What compounds the problems for teachers in the Catholic sector is that they are subject to powerful religiously ideological as well as economic pressures, pressures which serve to conceal the contradictions as well as control any dissident trends that might arise among them. There are few avenues for them to express their concerns and views in a neutral arena. It is an irony that, while the Catholic church in Australia has been heavily involved in encouraging the trade union movement in the past, its administrative agents in its schools are far less enthusiastic about unionisation creating the space for teacher autonomy.

A Marxian method will demonstrate that the church and its schools, far from ‘being in the world but not of it’ are very much implicated in the maintenance of capitalism but that their strong advocacy on justice issues auger possibilities for change. This must, of course, be preceded by a thorough going immanent critique.

Conclusion

The organic paradigm is a useful tool that facilitates the unravelling of the systems of thought of Marx and Hegel and making their insights more readily accessible. Both sought to establish an epistemological basis for studying the historical development in their society. In doing so they worked out a system which made method part of the dynamic process of change. An understanding of its nature provides a basis for developing a method that can usefully make sense of and explain the present trends in education.

A Marxian method developed for the critical study of education in general and of teachers’ work in Australian Catholic schools in particular has a lot to offer in analysing the web of contradictions which indicate movement and change. This is its relevance and challenge today.
Bibliography


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