

**Critical Education, Critical Pedagogy and Marxist  
Education: How should we educate our teachers?**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article proposes an eco-Marxist Manifesto for Teacher Education, focusing on activity within formal education systems and calls for education and cultural workers -including teacher educators- to become Marxist Activist Public Organic Intellectuals of the Working Class within micro-, meso- and macro-social and political arenas.

**Key Words:** *education, Marxism, teacher education, activism, critical education*

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## ARENAS OF ACTION

There are various arenas in which Marxist and Critical Educators and Teacher Educators can be, are, and should be (Hill, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 a, b) - within the limits of individual capabilities and strengths:

- 1) Within the classroom/ seminar room/lecture theatre;
- 2) Within the wider school community / organization- such as the staffroom, the union branch;
- 3) Within the local community/ town/ city- for example in tenants', benefits', anti-racist, anti-austerity, environmentalist or other local community organizations and movements- and within town-wide/ city-wide political parties, social movements and trade unions;
- 4) At national levels within such movements, parties and organisations.

I point to these arenas for transformative political social and educational activism since education takes place outside formal schooling and education systems as well as within. We engage in what Henry Giroux and Mike Cole call 'public pedagogy', and what Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci, McLaren *et al* call for- developing class, political consciousness. However, in this article I will focus on some aspects of education and schooling *within formal education systems* and relate these to various issues in Marxist theory.

### Key Characteristics of Marxism: What is Specifically Marxist About Education / Teacher Education Proposals in this article?

Marxists work for and willingly embrace reforms, such as minimum wage legislation, national health and social care provision, workers' and trade union rights. However, we go further. We Marxists are committed to forms of analysis and action that non-Marxist social democrats, radical liberals, radical democrats, feminists, anti-racists, Queer activists and environmental activists are *not*. These forms of analysis are:

1. *Class Analysis: the Capital- Labour Relation*
2. *Capitalism must be replaced by Socialism and that change is Revolutionary*

3. *Revolutionary Transformation of Economy and Society need to be preceded by and accompanied by a Class Programme, Organisation, and Activism*

## **1. Class Analysis: the Capital- Labour Relation**

The first distinguishing feature for Marxists is the *salience of class* as compared with other forms of structural oppression, discrimination and inequality. We stand with the reforms suggested and enacted by non-Marxist reformists, together with social movements and civil rights campaigners in opposing racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. But Marxists go further than criticizing (and acting against) social discrimination, oppressions. We go into economic rights. And further than that, that full economic rights *cannot* be achieved under a capitalist economic system, but only under a socialist or communist system. And that only the organized working class (black-white; male-female; straight-LGBT, Dalit and all other castes) that can organize and succeed in replacing the Capitalist system.

*The Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels, 1848/1977)* is startlingly powerful and relevant in its analysis of capitalism. Capitalism is the systemic and systematic exploitation by the capitalist class of the labour power of the working class(es), with the capitalists appropriating the surplus value created by the labour of the working class(es). This is the Capital-Labour Relation. With capitalists pocketing this surplus value as profit.

In Capitalism each of the two (major) classes of society engage in permanent struggle over increasing the proportion of surplus value (the value left when raw materials, rents, and wages/salaries have been paid) that should go into capitalists' pockets as profits, or into workers' pockets as wages, plus, as welfare benefits- into the social wage.

There is, under capitalism, a continuous 'class war', a continuous antagonistic relationship between the exploiting class and the exploited class, whatever the state of subjective appreciation/ understanding/ political and class consciousness is. In the

words of *The Communist Manifesto*, 'society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' (Marx and Engels, 1848/1977). In today's language, on the one hand, the 0.1%, 'the rulers of the universe', in conflict with most of the rest, all of us who sell our labour power to the capitalist class and to the education, health and other state apparatuses that keep reproduce a workforce fit to labour and create profits for the super-rich.

## 2. Capitalism must be replaced by socialism and that change is revolutionary

Marxists believe that *reforms are not sustainable under capitalism*, even if, when they are implemented, they are welcome. Reforms, social benefits and provision, are stripped away when there are the (recurrent and systemic) crises of capital, as happened in the 1930s, 1970s, and since 2008.

Social democratic politicians and parties, such as Pablo Iglesias/ Podemos in Spain, Alexis Tsipras/ Syriza in Greece, Jeremy Corbyn/ the Labour Party in the Britain, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortes in the USA, do not want to *replace* capitalism. they just want to manage it better, to regulate it, to reform it- to make it work better, with more 'social justice', with some- but only some- redistribution of income and wealth.

In classical Marxist analysis capitalism is never acceptable, whether regulated, reformed, social democratic, Christian Democratic, or not, because it is the exploitation (economic, therefore political, cultural, social oppression) of humans by humans. What defines classical and revolutionary Marxists is an analysis that *capitalism must be replaced*.

This is why Marxist activists work to develop class-consciousness, a sense of the working class being 'a class for itself' (a class with class consciousness) as opposed to 'a class in itself' (simply a class of people with the same relationship to the means of production, distribution and exchange) (Marx, 1847), a class with 'good sense' as

opposed to 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971). In *The Communist Manifesto* [Marx and Engels, 1848] explicitly identify the "formation of the proletariat into a class" as the key political task facing the communists.

Therefore *what is needed is a revolution* to replace, to get rid of, the capitalist economic system with its capitalist economic and social relations of production. The ballot box alone cannot bring about revolution. An elected socialist government would not be able to bring about much change which went against the interests of the capitalist class because the military, judiciary, police and corporate hierarchy are not democratic. The national and global capitalist class use state violence, and/ or the instruments of global or US capitalist economy or military to stop Socialism, or even left social democracy.

### **3. Revolutionary Transformation of Economy and Society need to be preceded by and accompanied by a Class Programme, Organisation, and Activism**

The *third* point of difference between Marxist and non-Marxist radicals is that in order to replace capitalism, Marxists have to actually work to organize for that movement, for that action. Thus a duty as a Marxist is *activist praxis*, within the limits of one's ability and competing demands. Marxists move beyond proposal into activism and praxis- *praxis* is action guided by theory, or theory in motion. As focuses on activity within formal teacher education courses and its wider education structures. As Marx (1845/2002) and John Molyneux (2012) note, 'philosophers have only interpreted the world. The point is to change it'.

Marxists, recognise that political organization, programme development, and political intervention are necessary. Revolutions do not fall off trees, like apples. As Lenin, in 'State and Revolution' (1918/1999) wrote, socialist revolutions have to be fought for- and defended.

### **Educate, Agitate, Organize**

Both in the education arena - including in teacher education courses- and in the wider society, we Marxists seek to serve and advance the interests of the working class- recognising the fundamental nature of class exploitation and also the multiple

oppressions based on identities and subjectivities and the gendered and 'raced; nature of social class. We, as teachers, as educators, are working class, too, those of us on permanent contracts, tenure, are a relatively well paid level, or stratum, of the working class. Those of us in precarious/ casual work on far lower levels of income: we all sell our labour power to capitalists and to the apparatuses of the capitalist state, such as schools and universities.

We Marxists have to consistently and courageously challenge the dominant hegemonic ideology of the ruling capitalist class, and what Althusser called, its Ideological State Apparatuses- its universities, departments and schools of teacher training/ teacher education, schools, media, and their allies in the institutions of religion.

But the situation we face is not just a war of ideas, an ideological war, a war of discourse. It is an economic class war, where the social and economic conditions and well-being of the working class are undermined and degenerated by the ruling class. Capitalist onslaughts result in deaths for 'superfluous' workers and sections of the non-working industrial reserve army. The poor get sick earlier and die young. In particular, in these times, of diseases and pandemics such as Covid-19. Protective Personal Equipment and space for 'social distancing' are, for hundreds of millions of the global poor, unattainable luxuries. For the rich (and, indeed, for the richer strata of the working class) they are available.

### **A Marxist Manifesto for Education**

Elsewhere (Hill, 2010) I have set out a Manifesto for Education. Many of these proposals are supported by other reform and social justice groups. But taken together, they offer a sustained challenge to neoliberal/ neo-conservative, pre-/proto/quasi fascist capitalism.

[1] Cut class sizes

[2] Abolish league tables and abolish most externally set assessment tasks

[3] Restore local democratic control of state schools that have been handed over to private corporations, charities and individuals to run, and establish local democratic control of such schools

[4] Establish a fully Comprehensive Secondary School system (known in India as a Common School) so that each school has a broad social class mix and mix of attainment levels

[5] Remove Private Profiteering from Schools/ Education services that have been privatized. Return these services to public/ social control

[6] Integrate private schools and colleges/ universities into the state education system

[7] Remove organised religion from schools and Close Faith Schools

[8] Provide a good, and local, school for every child

[9] Provide free, nutritious, balanced school meals

[10] Provide free adult education classes, non-vocational and cultural as well as vocational

[11] Restore or establish free, state-funded residential centres and Youth Centres/ Youth clubs

[12] Free up curricula that are over-prescriptive, to move beyond 'the basics curriculum'

[13] Revise school inspectorial and surveillance systems so they are supportive and advisory rather than punitive

[14] Encourage Critical Thinking across the curriculum. Teach children not 'what to think', but 'how to think'. Teach about Marxist analysis and the class exploitative nature of capitalism

[15] Teach in schools for ecological literacy and a readiness to act for environmental justice as well as for economic and social justice.

[16] Ensure that schools are anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic and are environmentalist

[17] Provide an honest sex education curriculum in schools that teaches children not just 'when to say no', but also 'when to say yes'.

[18] Develop proper recognition of all school workers, with no compulsory job redundancies

[19] Set up school councils which include student as well as teacher and non-teacher worker voices

[20] Broaden teacher education and training on the detailed lines suggested below, so it is theorized and socially and politically contextualised, not restricted (primarily or totally) to technical 'delivery' and control skills

[21] Set up a completely Free, fully funded, publicly owned and democratic education system from pre-school right through to university, with no fees, and with financial grants for poorer students post 16 and for further and higher education

### **Teacher Education: an Eco-Marxist Policy**

Now, congruent with these proposal for teacher education/ training, and based on **Edwards, Hill and Boxley (2018)**, I set out proposals that constitute a Marxist manifesto for teacher education for economic, environmental and social justice.

These curricular principles should form the basis of the review and development of policy, theory and practice:

- Engage in pedagogic theory in which the socio-political, economic and environmental contexts of schooling and education are explicit. This includes understanding of children, schooling, society and nature, their inter-relationships, and alternative views and methods of, for example, classroom organization, schooling, and the economic and political relationship of schooling to society and nature;
- Develop equal opportunities policies and praxis so that children do not suffer from labeling, under-expectation, stereotyping or prejudice;
- Enable student teachers to develop as critical, reflective teachers, able, for example, to decode media, ministerial (and indeed, Radical Left) distortion, bias, and propaganda. This encourages the development of teachers, able to interrelate and critique theory and practice (their own and that of others);
- Include not only technical reflection, but also Marxist critical reflection, so as to question a particular policy or theory, and to ask such critical questions as '*whose interests are served?*'; '*who wins?*' (if only by legitimating the status quo) and '*who loses?*';



- Enable student teachers to understand the social, economic and environmental inequalities and injustices present in their places of work and communities, and to challenge them.

## Curriculum Content

The first three areas of Curriculum Content below are common across different ideological positions, and because of their near universality these are not developed here. The next two are also widely shared, although they assume different degrees of salience. The final ten propositions are more specifically eco-Marxist/ Radical Left.

The Initial teacher Education (ITE) Curriculum should include:

- (1) *Classroom skills and competencies.* Teachers need reflective skills and understanding of learning, teaching and classroom management.
- (2) *Subject Knowledge.*
- (3) *The development of higher level analytical and intellectual skills.* This demands that teachers are capable of acting and thinking at an abstract level as understood by, for example, Vygotsky's 'scientific' thinking.
- (4) *Support for a major role for higher education institutions in ITE and opposition to school-led routes.* Higher Education institutions focus on developing the theoretical perspectives outlined above, promoting the advance of pedagogy through a theory-practice dialectic.
- (5) *Welcoming of different routes into teaching concordant with graduate teacher status and the above principles.*
- (6) *A commitment to economic, social and environmental justice, and recognition of the interconnection between the three.* If equal opportunities policies stop at celebrating cultural diversity and establishing positive and non-stereotypical role models, and do not see themselves as a development of broader economic justice, then they can be viewed as, in essence, conservative, for failing to challenge the status quo, based as it is on (raced and gendered) social class exploitation.
- (7) *Research evidence on equality issues: on racism, sexism, social class inequality, homophobia, and discrimination/ prejudice/ regarding disability*

*and special needs, and the intersection of these factors with economic and environmental inequalities.*

- (8) *A class-based approach to social, economic and environmental justice in the curriculum.*
- (9) *Skills in dealing with the incidence of classist, homophobic, racist, and sexist remarks and other types of harassment at various levels, such as within the classroom and throughout the institution and society.*
- (10) *Developing within institutions open fora on social and ecological justice where students and staff in institutions can meet in a supportive environment.*
- (11) *Critiques of competing approaches, ideologies, curricula, pedagogies of schooling, teacher education and society.*
- (12) *Developing knowledge and skills to critically examine the ideological nature of teaching and the nature of teachers' work.*
- (13) *The concurrent rather than the consecutive development of critical reflection, throughout and from the beginning of the ITE course.* If the social context of schooling is left until 'post-initial training', many Newly Qualified Teachers will not have post-initial training other what are, currently, instrumentalist in-service training concerned with how to 'deliver' results.
- (14) *Substantially predetermined rather than primarily negotiated curriculum objectives/ Should a critically reflective teaching program have predefined content or be negotiated? At various times the focus has been on programme content, critical analysis and curriculum development, pedagogic relationships between teachers/ teacher educators and pupils/ students. Arguably, heavy use of learner-centred discussion militates against the development of the broad span of critical theoretical insights argued for here. For organic intellectuals, the goal is not 'to tell the people what to think' but to enable them to think clearly to provide them with the tools such as critical literacy to engage in cultural action incorporating the exercise of critical (dialectical) consciousness aimed at social transformation.*
- (15) *The application of critical evaluation to school-based practice and experience.* Theory can provide the analytic and conceptual apparatus for thinking about practice, within the formal and hidden curriculum, while practice can provide the opportunity for the testing and assimilation of theory.

Successive governments in the USA and UK for example have prioritized school-led and school-based ITE programs. The detheorization of teacher education is a major problem in the development of effective teaching, critical skills, awareness and teaching, and in the development of a revolutionary transformative critical pedagogy.

- (16) *Environmental justice pedagogy*. This entails active engagement between students, communities and the environment and addresses complex social, economic and environmental issues so that students can develop critical, historical and transformative knowledge. This is important for students and teachers living and working in economically disadvantaged urban communities – because it can reorient the curriculum to deal with specific environmental justice issues that these communities face.

### **The Roles of Marxist Activist Educators**

The role of organic Marxist public intellectuals is crucial. I am talking of those who intellectualize social, political, cultural, economic matters from the standpoint of what Gramsci termed 'good sense', from a class - conscious perspective, such as the 'political' shop steward, or union organizer, the member of a socialist / Marxist party, the teacher, the youth worker, the journalist, the Marxist social media activist. Herein lies our pedagogical importance, of party, of our organization, of leaflets and newspapers and booklets and books and social media; here, as well as in conversation and in rhetorical speeches, we carry out the role of socialist analysis, of revolutionary pedagogy, of connecting the here and now of a workers' strike, whether it be over wages or over other issues such as safety at work during the Covid-19 pandemic, a rent strike, a pro-immigrant rally, an anti-austerity march, a picket line of a zero-hours contract employer, an occupation of a tax avoiding multinational company owned shop: here is essential Marxist pedagogy.

We Marxists are necessary. Necessary in leading and developing changes in consciousness, a change in class-consciousness, and in playing a leading role in organizing for the replacement of capitalism.

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