

# Marxist history and schooling: Beyond economism

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Marxist history emphasises the linkage between economic production, social institutions and everyday life. Critics of Marxism claim that its analysis of schooling is simplistic, functional and deterministic. The first part of this paper examines whether Marxist historical practice was in fact deterministic. It offers a nonreductionist and non-economistic reading of Marx's historical methodology. The second section moves on to consider some of the ways in which post-structuralist theorising can 'loosen-up' and revitalise mechanistic Marxist interpretations of the history of schooling.

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Marxist histories of schooling assume that individuals and social institutions are the product of historical forces founded in material conditions (economic base). Such a view of society comes from Marx's Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* (1859), where he explains how the forces of production determine class positions and social relationships:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness (Marx, 1970, p.20)

From Marx's perspective, society consisted of the economic 'base' and a predetermined 'superstructure' of other social institutions and practices such as education, ideas, beliefs and values. Bowles and Gintis' seminal book *Schooling in capitalist America* (1976) is perhaps the clearest exposition of early social reproduction theory. They argue that the 'correspondence principle' explains how schools integrated young people into the economic system (p.88). In brief, this meant that schools perpetuated the forms of consciousness, inter-personal behaviour and personality required to reproduce capitalist social relations (p.9). According to them, schooling reproduces technical and cognitive skills required in the workplace, legitimates economic inequality, rewards desirable personal characteristics, and reinforces a sense of stratified consciousness (pp.129-130).

Critics of Marxism argue that it is wrong to claim that the economic base determines state apparatuses, whether in 'the last instance' or not (see Liston, 1988). They argue that traditional Marxists are too static and deterministic in their understanding of the role of schooling. Some writers claim that it is impossible for orthodox Marxists to appreciate how schooling can operate in a manner that is not conducive to the requirements of the capitalist class (eg, Frankel, 1978; Bodie & Birnbaum, 1983). Other critics claim that Marxism has not only been deterministic but sexist and racist. It has failed to deal adequately with different male/female and white/black life experiences. Unfortunately, both gender and race have been theoretically non-existent or at best explained as a conjunct of class analysis (eg, Barrett, 1988; Barrett & MacIntosh, 1985). As a result, Marxist categories made it impossible to theorise oppressed groups like Aborigines and women.

In this paper I want to argue that despite such criticism Marxist history remains a powerful, coherent and valuable explanatory perspective for analysing the history of schooling. I want to come at this proposition in two major ways. First, to examine whether Marx's historical methodology was in fact deterministic. Second, to consider how post-structuralism can 'loosen up' and revitalise rigid Marxist interpretations of the history of schooling.

## Marx's historical methodology

Central to understanding Marx's approach to history is the idea of dialectic or the interplay between theory and evidence. What follows is an attempt to elaborate the nature of dialectic thinking, the place of 'facts' in the process of historical inquiry and Marx's use of historical abstraction.

At the eve of Marx's historical methodology was the idea of dialectic or a mode of analysis and thinking that Thompson called 'historical logic'. Thompson elaborates in the following passage:

By "historical logic" I mean a logical method of enquiry appropriate to historical materials, designed as far as possible to test hypotheses as to structure, causation, etc., and to eliminate self-confirming procedures ("instances", "illustrations"). The disciplined historical discourse of the proof consists in a dialogue between concept and evidence, a dialogue conducted by successive hypotheses, on the one hand, and empirical research on the other. The interrogator is historical logic; the interrogative a hypothesis (for example, as to the way in which different phenomena acted upon each other); the respondent is the evidence, with its determinate properties.... and it is to say that it is this logic which constitutes the discipline's ultimate court of appeal: not, please note, "the evidence", by itself, but the evidence interrogated thus. (Thompson, 1978, p.39)

According to Johnston, Marx highlighted two domains of method - 'the method of inquiry' and 'the method of presentation'. Marx himself explained:

Of course the method of presentation must differ from the method of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. If it is done successfully, if the life of the subject matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an *a priori* construction. (Quoted in Johnston, 1982, p.156)

For Marx, all inquiry began with 'research' or 'appropriating the material'. This meant that historical investigations began in the 'concrete' or 'real' world where evidence was verifiable in an empirical way. According to Lichtheim, Marx's ideas and hypotheses could be either confirmed or refuted by historical experience (Lichtheim, 1987, p.136). Marx himself emphasised this point:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way. (Quoted in McQuarie, 1978. p.17)

In Marx's methodology the research evidence became the 'fodder' for further processing. For him, evidence was a necessary, but not sufficient condition for useful inquiry. In contrast to the empiricism of traditional historians, Marx believed that historical inquiry required two further steps. First, the process of historical analysis produced categories that allowed differences to be identified, movement and change to be demonstrated, and historical abstraction to occur. Second, and having 'appropriated the material' and 'analysed its different forms', Marx sought to 'track down their inner connections'. Johnston described the process of *structural analysis* as an attempt to unearth the rules and tendencies of motion or the hidden nature of social laws (Johnston, 1982, p.164). For Marx, this meant going beyond the everyday aspects of life (manifestations) to fathom their real, internal motion (cause). Thus, Marx made a distinction between scientific knowledge (reality) and ideology (appearance). In his view, the task of science was to expose the real relations within a given society rather than simply describing the apparent and unreal manifestations of social relations (McQuarie, 1978, pp.14-17).

For Marx, the process of historical abstraction played a significant role in unearthing the hidden movement of social relations. According to Johnston, Marx was particularly critical of historical abstraction that 'externalised' or reflected everyday experience of bourgeois society in an uncritical way, represented the political and religious ideologies of the time, or generalised in such a way that only differences within capitalist society were recognised (Johnston, 1982, pp.166-174).

Given Marx's criticism of bourgeois abstraction, what did he see as good historical thinking? Again, Johnston in his

reading of Marx, identified four premises that together made for adequate historical abstraction in Marx's methodology. First, the *rationalist* premise assumes that systematic abstraction is the way people grasp reality. This means that thought is distinctive but not independent of social reality. Second, the *materialist* premise acknowledges that thought is distinctive while at the same time expressive of particular social relations. According to Hall, this means that political and ideological structures (eg. sexism and racism) exist in particular material conditions (Hall, 1980, p.322). In other words, thought by itself (idealism) is an insufficient condition for discovering knowledge. Third, the *historical* premise emphasises the changing nature of social relations. According to Johnston, the task of historical investigation is to "render back into history relations which bourgeois thinking had naturalised" (Johnston, 1982, p.182). Fourth, the *structural* premise acknowledges that social relations are a product of particular social formations. In other words, history should not be limited by simplistic reductions that fail to take account of different 'forms' and changing historical context (Johnston, 1982, p.183).

The Chilean sociologist, Dos Santos, illustrated the place of historical abstraction in Marx's analysis of social class:

The starting point of Marx's analysis is the study of a determinate mode of production. At any given moment social classes appear as 'personifications', the volitional, personal, active content of certain relations that are described abstractly. This does not mean that at a more concrete level it will be impossible to describe the classes of society as social groups that can be studied sociologically (ie. empirically). However, this empirical study of classes has a definite theoretical sense only when it is located within the framework of an abstract analysis. That is, it is only possible to arrive at an explanatory level of analysis when the empirical descriptive level is inserted into an abstract theoretical picture. This gives a more precise form to the problem of levels of abstraction, by clearly defining the theoretical starting point of analysis. (Dos Santos, 1970, p.173)

From Dos Santos' explanation, clearly Marx's theoretical abstractions expressed particular historical conditions. As a result, Johnston believed that the gap between theory and history vanished because Marx was doing history all the time only in more or less abstract ways (Johnston, 1982, p.165). In this sense, Johnston argued that it may be better to speak not of 'history' and 'theory' but of historical categories and accounts that operate at different levels of abstraction (Johnston, 1982, p.166).

At the heart of Marx's analysis was a concern for the social situation and daily experience of working class people. For him, history was neither abstract nor removed from people's life experience. Rather, as Dos Santos pointed out, Marx's analysis operated at different levels of abstraction. Historical analysis began in the concrete social situation of people and moved to the abstract level of the mode of production (Dos Santos, 1970, p.173). While Marx acknowledged that each level of abstraction had a degree of autonomy, they were also interdependent. This form of analysis implies a dynamic flow between the abstract level of the mode of production and the concrete world.

At this point it may be appropriate to briefly consider four levels of abstraction that Dos Santos identified in Marx's work. The first level of abstraction, the *mode of production*, concerns itself with the characteristics of the forces and relations of production in capitalist societies. Fundamental to the capitalist mode of production is the existence of two classes: the capitalist class and the working class. Typically, a small number of people own the means of production (capitalist class) while the majority of people are forced to sell their labour for wages (working class). Insofar as labour is characterised by exchange value rather than use value, it is increasingly exploited by the capitalist class for greater profit (surplus value). The desire of the capitalist class for increased profits (accumulation) becomes the driving force of capitalist societies (Catley, 1978, p.17).

The second level of abstraction focuses on *social structure*. In the words of Dos Santos, it attempts "to relate to an historically and geographically situated universe of discourse ... of a determinate social formation and its relations with other social formations" (Dos Santos, 1970, p.177). At this lower level of abstraction, analysis is primarily concerned with historically specific social situations. Here, the focus is on describing the relations of production in their specific forms. In Australia's case, the emergence of a strong trade union movement and large service sector created a distinctive social structure. Today, the relations of production in Australia are complicated by the fragmentation of social classes along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender and age. As a result, there is a far more complex and differentiated class structure than is supposed at the first level of abstraction. Significantly, this sort of analysis allows

us to draw attention to different 'historical trajectories' rather than deriving global and deterministic interpretations of mass schooling (Bodie & Birnbaum, 1983, p.5). As a result, it is possible to see schooling not only as a site of social reproduction but importantly, the product, determinant and object of particular class struggles (Wright, 1978, p.27). Viewed in this way, schooling can produce contradictions, behaviours and outcomes that may not necessarily be a mechanistic reflection of the relations of production (eg, Bowles & Gintis, 1986; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Shapiro, 1990).

At the third level of analysis the focus shifts to *everyday life*. According to Dos Santos, "the tragic, grotesque or comical aspects of human existence emerge ... it becomes life" (1970, p.179). At the personal level, it is possible to appreciate how individual social circumstances determine the sorts of life options that are available to people. For instance, how does the educational experience of a working class, non-English speaking Australian girl differ from that of a middle class, Anglo-Australian girl. At this level of analysis, we can begin to understand how people make sense of and interpret their world.

Finally, Marx's analysis sought to explain how *economic crises* crystallise societal contradictions. Habermas and Offe are two writers who developed Marx's original contribution to an understanding of the ideas of 'crisis' and 'contradiction'. Habermas' work highlighted how the state's contradictory functions - accumulation and legitimation - produced "unsettling and publicising effects" (Habermas, 1976, p.22). For him, a crisis in the economic sphere reflects itself in socio-cultural institutions such as schools. Similarly, Offe argued that the state's 'regulatory resources' - fiscal policy, administrative rationality and mass loyalty - have difficulty in legitimising socio-economic inequalities produced in the economic system (Offe, 1976, p.57).

What does all this tell us about Marx's approach to history? First, as Johnston argued in his reading of Marx, determinism runs "against every principle of Marx's 'best' practice" (Johnston, 1982, p.200). Recent non-reductionist readings of Marx's work offered by Gramsci (1971) and developed by Mouffe (1979), Hall (1980, 1985) and Johnston (1982), show that it is possible to develop an analysis of schooling that can address the problems of economism, 'a prioriism', reductionism, functionalism and a lack of historical specificity. As Levine argues, a Marxist approach to history can offer a "subtle, sensitive and accurate method of social analysis" (Levine, 1978, p.163).

Second, Marx's use of the abstract idea of the capitalist mode of production is a theoretical construct composed of many elements or parts, each being distinct and, importantly, subject to empirical scrutiny. Liston, a critic of Marxist determinism, maintained that any reasonable and useful form of social inquiry must be thoroughly empirical:

Regardless of how fact, theories and values are conjoined, evidential examinations provide a central source of control over the arbitrariness of belief. (Liston, 1988, p.37)

It was Marx himself who argued that the elements (economic, intellectual, political and cultural) of society did not exist in an 'ideal' or abstract form but were in reality a reflection of concrete phenomena. In Marx's words:

In a general analysis of this kind, it is nearly always assumed that the actual conditions correspond to their concept, or, what is the same, that actual conditions are represented only to the extent that they are typical of their own general type. (Quoted in McQuarie, 1978, p.24)

Within Marxist thought there is a growing tendency toward a more non-reductionist and empirical analysis of the relationship between the economic, political and ideological levels of society. Hall (1980, p.325) developed the idea of 'articulation' or "the relation of linkage and effectivity between different levels or elements of a social formation" as a way forward. He believed that the idea of articulation offered an opportunity to rethink the complex unity of a social formation without falling back on a simplistic reductionist logic on the one hand, or a form of sociological pluralism on the other. Hall explained the basic tenet of this revised Marxist position in the following way:

...we cannot ... deduce *a priori* the relations and mechanisms of the political and ideological structures exclusively from the level of the economic. The economic level is the necessary but not sufficient condition for explaining the operations at other levels of the society (the premise of non-reductionism). We cannot assume an express relation of necessary correspondence' between them (the premise of historical specificity)... This is an important, indeed critical qualification. It requires us to demonstrate



rather than to assume, *a priori* - what the nature and degree of 'correspondence' is, in any specific historical case. Thus, through this opening, some of the criticism ... for example the requirement to be historically specific - begins to be met, within the framework of this seminal revision. (Hall, 1980, p.329-330)

In summary, a spirit of critique and dialectic thinking characterised Marx's approach to history. Marxist history contained a sense of social totality, an emphasis on the interdependence of the whole, a concern for the 'lived experience' of those people subjected to venous forms of domination and subordination, and knowledge that is capable of informing practice. Essentially, Marxist history aimed to expose existing power relations to cause a fundamental transformation of society.

## **'Loosening up' Marxist history**

In this section I want to consider how post-structuralism can 'loosen up' and 'fill in' some of the gaps in traditional Marxist histories of schooling. One of the major deficiencies that characterised Marxist histories of schooling was the failure to elaborate an understanding of the constitution of 'the subject'. As a result, individual consciousness was of secondary importance to systemic considerations. In searching for a theoretical perspective that can better illuminate the relationship between structure and individual conscious and unconscious thoughts and desires, it is necessary to turn to the post-structuralist ideas of discourse, subjectivity and power.

A central tenet of post-structuralist theory is the relation between language, subjectivity and the social organisation of power. In the post-structuralist literature, discourse refers to the power to create reality by naming and giving it meaning. According to Green, discourse has a semantic unity and provides "the means to meaning, the 'mechanisms' in and by which the social production of meaning ('knowledge' and 'truth') takes place" (Green, 1986, pp.8-9). Importantly, according to Henriques (1984, p.113) discourse does not start out as a system of statements about the 'real' but reflects historically specific material conditions.

Discourse theory illuminates how particular discursive fields, connected with social institutions such as education, impose meaning on reality by defining its nature, purpose and practice (Donald, 1985, p.216). According to Weedon, discourses are ways of constituting knowledge, social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations. They address and constitute the individual's mind, body and emotions (Weedon, 1987, p.216). In this way, every society constructs its own 'regime of truth'. In countering the blindness of structuralism to the processes of individual identity formation I would like briefly to consider how the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe, Foucault, Giddens and Giroux can enhance Marxist histories of schooling.

## **Laclau and Mouffe**

Laclau and Mouffe seriously challenge the usefulness of class as the primary causal principle of various subject positions. Laclau and Mouffe argue that it is necessary to analyse the "plurality of diverse and frequently contradictory positions and to discard the idea of a perfectly unified and homogeneous agent" (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.84, Laclau & Mouffe, 1982, pp.91-113). What concerns Laclau and Mouffe is the Marxist tendency to privilege class relations and, as a consequence, naturalise and bracket off other specific concerns such as feminism, racism, environmentalism and the peace movement (see Hinkson, 1991, p.144).

In Laclau and Mouffe's view discourse or the "system of differential entities ... or moments" is the key to understanding the constitution of subjectivity (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.iii). In their view, discourse constitutes all social relations (p.105)

Important in Laclau and Mouffe's work, is the argument that subjectivity is the product of diverse subject positions (pp.115-117). This means that subjectivity is articulated within all the discourses that the subject moves including class, religious, sexual, civil and moral discourses. Laclau and Mouffe emphasise a 'totality of difference' to explain the constitution of the subject (p.143). Yeatman explains the multiplicity of discursive subject positions in the following way:

The individual's history is composed of the experience of a range of discourses, passing through the family and its discourses of authority, gender, morality, religion, politics; into school and its discourses of knowledge, science, authority; to work and adulthood. (Yeatman, 1990, p.164)

The emphasis on the multiplication of interests means that subjectivity cuts across distinct and even contradictory discourses of identity. Yeatman makes the point that discursive reality is never determined by any one discursive system because subjects are always positioned interdiscursively (p.164). According to Weedon, the discursive constitution of the subject is open to contestation because individuals are not the mere objects of language but the site of discursive struggle (Weedon, 1987, p.106). In the words of De Lauretis:

Self and identity ... are always grasped and understood within particular discursive configurations. Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions. (Quoted in Yeatman, 1990, p.16)

In Australia, Connell is one writer who has developed the idea that subjectivity is the result of 'what people do'. For him, subjectivity:

... is a construction, something made. What is made', specifically, is the coherence, intelligibility, and liveability of one's social relationships through time. (Connell, 1987, p.221)

## **Foucault**

Foucault's work illuminates the connection between power/knowledge and subjectivity. His writing attempts to explain how social institutions construct individual identities. This part of the paper argues that the materiality of Marxism requires a sense of what Foucault calls 'genealogy' or "a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledge, discourses, domains of objects" (Foucault, 1985, p.90). The important thing to note about genealogy, is that it accounts for the imaginary ordering of the symbolic (Donald, 1985, p.241). So the way we come to perceive ourselves is not 'preordained' or 'natural' but a social construct built around a norm that differentiates between people.

One of Foucault's major achievements was his ability to show how human beings were both objects and subjects constructed through certain forms of knowledge and relationships of power (Foucault, 1982, p.108). Smart explains Foucault's idea in the following way:

It is by virtue of a dual analytic focus upon forms of knowledge and relations of power through which the human subject has been objectivized and upon techniques of the self and related discourses in terms of which human beings 'have learned to recognize themselves as subjects' respectively that Foucault's work has revealed the complex multiple processes from which the strategic constitution of forms of hegemony may emerge (Smart, 1986, p.160)

Central to understanding Foucault's idea of power is the proposition that knowledge and power are inseparable:

We should admit ... that power produces knowledge ... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1977, p.27)

Foucault demonstrates how a new set of operations or procedures (technologies) joining knowledge, power and truth come together to constitute the subject. Foucault uses the idea of 'disciplinary technology' to explain how individuals are 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1977, p.136). In contrast to Marxism, Foucault believes that power "runs through the whole social body" (p.91). In other words, the state is superstructural to a whole series of existing power relationships that invest the body, sexuality, kinship, knowledge and technology. As a result, the state becomes "the codification of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible" (p.92). Seen in this way, life itself is political.

Important in Foucault's work is the proposition that social institutions operate through a combination of subtle mechanisms or 'micro-physics' of power such as 'hierarchical observation', 'normalising judgements' and 'the examination'. According to Rabinow, the state produces an increasingly totalising web of control by increasing its specification of individuality (Rabinow, 1984, p.22). Through various disciplinary techniques the state becomes both a 'totalising' and 'individualising' institution (p.14).

Curtis' history *Building the educational state: Canada west, 1836-1871* (1988) illustrates the usefulness of the Foucaultian approach to the history of schooling. Curtis' historical analysis of Canadian schooling explains how educational practices, devices, techniques and instruments of governance ('habitation') construct popular culture and character habits conducive to the moral order of bourgeois hegemony. For Curtis, the central function of schooling was:

The creation in the population of new habits, attitudes, or orientations, desires; the channelling of popular energy, into particular regulatory forms supportive of a bourgeois social order - these were the objectives of education. Over time, these objectives have been absorbed into the texture of state schooling. (Curtis, 1988, p.366)

Drawing on these theoretical developments it is possible to develop a more complex and sophisticated account of the history of schooling than rigid Marxist approaches have so far provided. Importantly, it opens the way for a less monolithic interpretation of how schooling constructs not only inequalities of class but also race and gender relations (see Sarup, 1986, chapter 1). Barrett, in the 1988 edition of *Women's Oppression Today* acknowledges the failure of Marxist feminism to adequately analyse the theoretical and political role of race in perpetuating social divisions. She claims that the determinist model of classical Marxism failed to theorise subjectivity in other than simple class terms (Barrett, 1988, p.xi). As a result Barrett, like many others, has turned to the post-Marxist position that attempts to 'loosen the class basis in favour of a more general appreciation of domination or power, which can take a variety of forms or agents' (Barrett, 1988, p.xviii). She believes that Laclau and Mouffe's analysis of the decentred subject and Foucault's ideas on 'discourse', 'regimes of truth' and 'power/knowledge' are a fertile ground for feminism.

## **Towards a dialectic view of structure and agency**

Although post-structuralism offers a more complex and non-reductive explanation of the constitution of the subject, it does suffer from a lack of clarity on the question of determinacy. Post-structuralism with its emphasis on causal pluralism and multiple discourse may very well run the risk of losing any notion of 'dominance'. Hall highlights this potential problem when he suggests that it seems unnecessary to throw out the conception of a social totality to the point of "no necessary class belongingness" (Hall, 1985, p.50).

In this part of the paper I want to consider how the work of Giddens and Giroux can contribute to a dialectic understanding of the interplay between structure and agency. For them, individuals are not the product of predetermined structures or puppets acting outside subject thoughts, desires and actions. On the contrary, both writers highlight how the subject is an active and yet constrained agent. This dialectic view stems from their common dislike of historical reductionism and the primacy given to the economic sphere that characterised traditional Marxist accounts of the constitution of the subject.

Particularly useful in developing a non-reductionist approach to the history of schooling is Giddens' idea of the duality of structure' (Giddens, 1978, p.5). Central to Giddens' sociology is the idea of the ongoing dialectic of structure and practice. For him, social analysis begins neither in the consciousness nor in activities of the subject, nor in the characteristics of the object, but in the *duality of structure*. This refers to:

... the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practice. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution. (Giddens, 1978, p.5)

McLennan makes the point that while history has a determinable shape or structure, it must always be incomplete because the relations it seeks to analyse are between human beings who are themselves causal agents who materially

change history (McLennan, 1981, p.233). Larrain also argues that the idea of determination is multi-dimensional. For him, determination involves both *conditioning* or the imposition of certain constraints situated in a specific historical context and *production* whereby social consciousness and social institutions produce social practice (Larrain, 1983, p.193). As a consequence, individuals carry out their daily routines within a structured totality that is both enabling and at the same time constraining.

Like Giddens, Giroux's work also focuses on the interplay between structure and agency. In Giroux's words, meaning is 'not reducible to the individual and has to be understood in its articulation with ideological and material forces as they circulate and constitute the wider society'. Giroux explains:

... human behaviour is rooted in a complex nexus of structured needs, common sense, and critical consciousness ... so as to produce multiple subjectivities and perceptions of the world and everyday life. (Larrain, 1983, p. 146)

The important thing to note about Giroux's work is that he draws attention to the cultural field where:

... knowledge, discourse, and power intersect so as to produce historically specific practices of moral and social regulation. (Giroux, 1985, p.23)

For Giroux, power is a concrete set of practices that produces social forms through which experience and different subjectivities are constructed. According to Giroux, discourse is constitutive of, and a product of, power as it functions to produce and legitimate particular ideologies and practices (p.23). In a recent article with Simon, Giroux explains how the discourse of pedagogy attempts to deliberately influence the production of identities within a particular set of social relations (1988, p.12). Giroux and Simon claim that pedagogy is a practice through which people acquire certain 'moral character'. They explain how pedagogy organises:

... a view of how a teacher's work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, in what direction we should desire, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment ... It is in this sense that to propose a pedagogy is to construct a political vision. (p.12)

Central to Giroux's writing is the idea of critical pedagogy or what he calls 'cultural politics'. For Giroux, this means understanding how particular fields of discourse produce and transform cultural processes (Giroux, 1985, p.36). The strength of Giroux's work is that he develops a form of analysis that is sensitive to the dialectic interconnections between structural forces and a theory of self-production. Drawing on this sort of analysis it is possible to move beyond a monolithic view of schooling toward a perspective that is dynamic, flexible, historical and, importantly, sees people as knowing subjects rather than unknowing objects.

## Conclusion

This paper argues that Marxist history is not necessarily deterministic. While Marx accepted the basic proposition that economic forces are the 'motor of history', he argued that all history expressed particular historical conditions. Marx did not believe that the political and ideological levels of society were solely reducible to the economic level (economism). Rather, he argued that social institutions operated within particular historical and economic constraints. Thus, Marxist history seeks to understand the nature of the relationship between economic forces of production, social institutions and everyday life in specific historical circumstances. The strength of Marxist history is that it allows us to interrogate the history of schooling in relation to broader socio-economic forces. A major weakness is its failure to adequately theorise the constitution of subjectivity. In the second part of the paper I have sought to illustrate how poststructuralism can enhance the materiality of Marxism. It is my contention that the ideas of people such as Laclau and Mouffe, Foucault, Giddens and Giroux among others can add significantly to Marxist histories of schooling through their focus on subjectivity. I believe the eclectic approach adopted in this paper can go some way to balancing the relation between structure and individual identity. However, as Apple reminds us, the test of a theory's fruitfulness is in its "applicability to the interrogation of concrete situations" (Apple, 1982, p.5).



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