Reading Karl Marx; Debates and Relevance for Contemporary Education

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Abstract

Education continues to be one of the most influential institutions in modern societies. This is because of the continued need for role modeling, unity, sense of direction, exchange of ideas, defining of success and failure to mention. Karl Marx becomes pertinent here as one of the most influential men in modern history. Marxst ideas of education stressed on indoctrination of ideas and practices, no wonder the state ensures that education aims at creating attitude and values. The state is to be strengthened through the creation of a classless society. The proletariat will, no doubt, dominate in the Marxst state. But education will not be limited to a handful of people. Marxsm lays stress on providing education to all sections of the society, i.e., universal education. Equalization of educational opportunity is the Marxst educational goal. Marxst education aims at maximum good to the maximum number. Social advancement is to be ensured through education since education is considered as the greatest instrument of social change. Only intellectual education cannot achieve this goal.

Key Words:Karl Marx, contemporary Education, sociology,Marxsm

Introduction:

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but learners may also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. The methodology of teaching can be on one hand pedagogical but it can also be andragogical in nature.

Education commonly is divided formally into such stages as preschool or kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and then college, university, or apprenticeship. A right to education has been recognized by most governments as part of their national policy, including at the global level: Article 13 of the United Nations' 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes a universal right to education. In most regions education is compulsory up to a certain age.

Marxsm Explored:

Marxsm is an ideology linked to a German scholar Karl Marx. Karl Marx was born in Trier on May 5, 1818. He studied at the universities of Bonn, Berlin, and Jena. He was critical of social conditions and existing political arrangements as he felt these did not address the concerns of the people. In 1843, Marx was compelled to resign as editor. Soon afterwards the paper was also forced to stop publication. Marx then went to Paris (where he first met Engels). His radicalism had come to be recognizably 'communistic'. His revolutionary analysis and activity led to him being ordered to leave Paris in 1845. Karl Marx went and settled in Brussels and began to organize Communist Correspondence Committees in a number of European cities. This led to the establishment of the Communist League (and the writing of the Communist Manifesto with Engels. With the unrest and revolutionary activity of 1848, Marx was again forced to leave a country. His history continued both as an academician and a prolific writer on a number of disciplines form economics to politics and social issues but this is not over explored in this paper.

On The Aims Of Education In Marxsm:

Marx on education laid stress on the process of indoctrination of ideas and practices all in form of knowledge. This explains why, in the Marxst state, education aims at creating Marxst attitude and values and the state is to be strengthened through the creation of a classless society. Education will not be limited to a handful of people. Marxsm lays stress on providing education to all sections of the society, i.e., universal education. Marxsm provides equalization of educational opportunity as the basic educational goal. Marxst education aims at maximum good to the maximum number. This is a utilitarian understanding of education being reflected here. Social advancement is to be ensured through education. Education is considered as the greatest instrument of social change. Only intellectual education cannot achieve this goal. A more comprehensive but not rigorous education system needs to be emphasized to beef up on the existing education system.

Hence, in Marxsm, emphasis is laid on vocational and technological education. All stakeholders say the teachers as well as the students must know clearly the true character of social development. Disciplines like History and economics should be taught in proper perspective and the students must learn the fundamental principles of science. The essence of studying these two subjects is to help students understand the evolutionary as well as the materialistic forces that drive their society.

In Marxst education 'labor and work' are considered as integral parts. A workman cannot work properly unless he possesses a sound health. Hence physical education is considered as an important aim in Marxst education. Today schools emphasize sports either in the morning or the evenings as part of the curriculum. It also aims at cultural and aesthetic development, and further aims at indoctrination in communist and socialist values. Marxst education aims at creating creative, productive and faithful citizenship.

According to Lenin, education is an integral part of culture and culture and education both are shaped by socioeconomic conditions. But labor is the basis and source of all cultural advancement. That is why, in Marxst education, labor occupies an important place. In Marxst education the philosophic child is given the central position. Development of the child mind is the ultimate aim. Education of the child depends to a great extent on the education level of the mother. On one hand, Marxst education aims at women's education too. Communist Manifesto¹ declares free, universal, elementary education for all.

¹ The Communist Manifesto (originally Manifesto of the Communist Party) is an 1848 political pamphlet by German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Commissioned by the Communist League and originally published in London (in German known as Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei) just as the revolutions of 1848 began to erupt, the Manifesto was later recognized as one of the world's most influential political documents. It presents an analytical approach to the class struggle (historical and then-present) and the problems of capitalism and the capitalist mode of production, rather than a prediction of communism's potential future forms

According to Karl Marx, it's said that education means to us three things:

(a) Intellectual Development,

(b) Physical Development,

(c) Polytechnised Education will give knowledge relative to the General Sciences and principles of all productive processes'.

This gives education a number of objectives and these include ensuring no discrimination to be made in respect of educational opportunities. He also says that education is to be given to all sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed, and sex social and economic status. Common education should be provided to both men and women. Coeducation is an accepted principle in Marxsm. Education will be universal and compulsory. No discrimination should be made among schools but these should be public schools. Establishment of common school system is the cherished goal of Marxsm. Marxsm advocates secular education in schools. In Marxst system of education there will be only one agency that is the state. Private agency is banned in Marxst education as these always yearn for profits and hence compromise the education system. This is centrally to the present education system that has been privatized with less of government control and hence largely aimed at profits.

To make education work well in the contemporary societies, there is need for a clear way to start and this should begin with the development of the curriculum. This should have features related to Marxst philosophy and doctrines being taught at all levels of education on a compulsory basis. The students should be made conscious about class division, unequal distribution of wealth, exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class, etc. Those subjects are included in the curricula which tend to develop skill instead of abstract knowledge. Marxsm lays stress on respect for labor and, as such, work-experience is regarded as an integral part of education.

The curriculum includes the socially useful subjects such as science, mathematics, geography, life science, geology, astronomy etc. Another case is that the history of communist movement

and political economy should also be included in the curriculum to help students understand the state community relationships as they have been developing from time to time. At the primary level, only the mother-tongue should be taught. But at the secondary level, the curriculum should include foreign languages as a way of globalizing the studies to make these students ready for international opportunities. Creative work and co-curricular activities should be given an important place in Marxst curriculum. These include physical exercise, music, painting, games and sports etc. Most of our societies have not thought these subjects as relevant for the students.

More particularly, according to Marxsm, the mode of teaching is quite vital in helping better education systems today. Marxsm notes that emphasis should be laid on practical aspect of education instead of theoretical aspect to give students hands on skills. This is why the Marxst education is based on the principle of learning by doing. Students should work both in the agricultural farms and factories. Education should not be confined within the four walls of the school as there is a lot students can learn from the general environment outside the school system. The natural environment and the community at large can also serve as great books and teachers. Marxst education emphasizes learning through personal experience of the child. It emphasizes group activity instead of individual activity as this builds the culture of sharing, teamwork and cooperation. Marxst education intends to promote cooperative spirit instead of competitive spirit among students. This is what education today is all about. Another question to ask is what the role of the teacher should be in this era where technology seems to be playing the teacher role. This can be misleading to think teachers are irrelevant and hence to note, their roles are numerous today more than ever probably.

As far as Karl Marx is concerned, the role of the teacher is significant and crucial in Marxst education. This is why the teacher must be fully equipped not only with the content of education but also the Marxst methodology of teaching as well as Marxst aims of education. In the same respect, a teacher must entirely be different in attitude and temperament from a bourgeois teacher. His philosophy of teaching must always be the Marxst philosophy. He must be an active member of the Marxst social order as this emphasizes on stability and unity of all. According to Lenin,

"A best Marxst worker can only be a best Marxst teacher. Both in thought and action he must be a true Marxst".

With reference to this, one should have a very strong adherence to the principles of Marxsm. He should not have only mastery on the content of education but also have consciousness about life, social environment and communist ideology. He should possess sound health, respect for cultural heritage, deep practical sense, socialistic bent of mind and true patriotism. This seems to be missing out in the present education system as teachers are either half baked or not grounded in the Marxst principles that govern education.

The basis of a humanistic education is the real conditions of existence that individuals organize to keep themselves alive. Thus, individuals forge certain kinds of social relationships of production that have a double transforming function: humanizing nature and humans at the same time. In a society founded on the principle of private ownership of the means of production as can be seen in capitalism, this humanization process is interrupted by the alienation manifested towards objects that humans have produced.²

One should however not discard the fact that this humanistic perspective on education is shown at two separate but dialectically interlinked times: (a) when criticism is made regarding the alienation produced by the educational process within the context of a society founded on the primacy of private ownership of the means of production, for which the principal result is the mutilation of humankind; and, at the same time, (b) when the possibility of human omnilateralism is proposed within the scope of revolutionary society based on the economic, social, political and cultural presuppositions advocated by socialism.

Additionally, the humanistic dimension starts from the premise that one of the corollaries of education is the process of production and reproduction of knowledge inherent to the mediation needed for praxis, which results in humanization of humans. Consequently, the classic

 $^{^{2}}$ In all, the complete human (omnilateral), educated in the arts of doing (non-alienated work) and speaking (policy of emancipation) for which the premises already lie within the sphere of capitalist society, will only historically come into being in a socialist society marked by the absence of private ownership of the means of production

knowledge historically accumulated by humanity is taken to be the essential and predominant medium for educational action. Thus, human knowledge (scientific, technological and cultural) forms a superstructure within the multiple and contradictory social relationships that people establish with each other and with nature, during the process of achieving their material and spiritual conditions of existence. Within this perspective, knowledge provides an abstract representation of the concrete realities of the world and expresses the two dimensions of mankind's social praxis, i.e. the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, as stated by Marx and Engels (1980:25):

The production of ideas, representations and consciousness is primarily, directly and intimately linked with people's material activities and material trade: it is the language of real life. People's representations, thoughts and intellectual exchanges arise here as direct emanations from their material behaviour.

Thus, there is a close connection between knowledge and the material production relationships developed historically by socio-economic formations. However, once knowledge has been created, it has relative autonomy in relation to the historical context that shaped it. Moreover, it only becomes a constitutive part of the universal heritage of humanity when it is capable of providing summarized understanding and explanation for the contradictory and complex historical movement of its time, as expressed by Antonio Gramsci (1999:141)³.

It is true that a historical era and a given society are particularly represented by the average intellectual level and consequently the level of mediocrity. This requires a whole range of education and rationalism which is only possible with an improved education system offering the

³ Public schools as developed today in bourgeois society are unable to achieve an effective relationship between school education, technological training and gymnastics, as proposed by Marx, i.e. to combine intellectual and physical training with productive work. Perhaps today, this would be required more in the sense foreseen by Gramsci, i.e. with strong emphasis on general, humanistic and intellectual training. Today, however, at the same time as the so-called "information society" is experienced, which has raised optimistic perspectives for the possibility of achieving free time (i.e., the possibility that mankind could finally become free from the "curse of Sisyphus", the symbol of repetition, eternal restarts and confinement to heavy work), severe socioeconomic inequality continues to plague the majority of society.

best services in line of role modelling.⁴ However, disseminated mass ideology needs to be differentiated from scientific works and major philosophical syntheses, which are also the true keys to interpretation. Such syntheses need to be clearly surpassed, i.e. their grounds need to be positively or negatively confirmed, by contrasting them with philosophical syntheses of greater importance and significance.

Thus, knowledge accumulated historically through the process of humanity's development is selectively filtered through bodies within society of an ideological nature. For example, universities deal with knowledge in a two-way manner: on the one hand, they rank it with the aim of reproducing it through education for new generations of individuals; on the other hand, they make explicit the epistemological logic of construction of such knowledge, i.e. they standardize theoretical methods for producing new knowledge. What seems to be missing here is the emphasis of creativity and production of more knowledge by students after or even within the course of the knowledge attainment.

It should be remembered that since the beginning of Western civilization in Greco-Roman society till the contemporary societies, schools have been the pivotal and hence social site tasked with systematizing both reproduction and production of knowledge and have become the main institution for enabling the process of knowledge transmission between generations of humankind. However, throughout history, education has also been thought of in another dimension, as can be seen in Tolstoy (1988), which in certain way was a precursor of the ideas concerning pedagogical activism. Already in his old age, he wrote thus:

"I have meditated greatly about education. There are questions, for which I have arrived at doubtful conclusions, but there are also questions for which the conclusions that I have reached are definitive and I feel unable to change them or to add to them, whatever they are."

⁴ Marx formulated the core of this educational concept along the lines of the combination between education and labor. He took the view that it was possible through education, allied with social praxis, to shape new individuals who would be aware of their historical potential that, in an embryonic manner, had already been shown in the industrial revolution.

This means that education is only a complex and difficult task if we wish to educate our children or any other person without educating ourselves. If we understand that only through ourselves can we educate others, the question of education will disappear and a question of life will remain: how should we live? This will provide an annex between life and education which seems to be missing presently.

Furthermore, reference can be made to Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), who, as is known, was one of Marx's reference points. This Greek philosopher, following the lines of Homer's concept of education, also advocated pedagogical concepts based on the arts of speaking and doing, as a formative process for citizens who would decide on the political destiny of the city-state at assemblies in public meeting places. In other words, arts taught at a single time, which would shape omnilateral individuals.⁵

The ideal of the world and education based on the principle of full human fulfilment is still a utopia, but as Manacorda wrote, only humankind has broken the ties of natural unilateralism and invented the possibility of becoming something else that is better and even omnilateral. In his view, if this possibility, which is given only through living within society, was denied to the majority by society itself, or rather, denied to everyone to a greater or lesser degree, the categorical imperative of human education can be stated thus: "Although individuals seem in nature and in fact to be unilateral, efforts can be made to educate them in any part of the world so that they can become omnilateral" (Manacorda, 1989:361).

In 1848, as is seen in the Communist Party Manifesto, Marx and Engels proposed polytechnic schools: this implied that there was need for free public education for all children and abolition of child labor in factories as practised today. (Marx and Engels, 1982:125).Today, most societies have not emphasized the technical or polytechnic education as important and this has been reflected in reduced government expenditure on such, in other words called austerity.

⁵ Aristotle was one of the first thinkers to put forward the idea of a state school and criticize education for specific positions within the family. He took the view that only the city-state would be able to educate for the common good, although he restricted this view to citizens.

In his *Criticism of the Gotha Program*⁶, he also took up a position against "popular education under the auspices of the State", by stating:

"This matter of popular education under the auspices of the State is completely inadmissible. It is one thing to determine through a general law what the resources for public schools should be (the qualifications of the teaching staff, teaching materials, etc) and to monitor the compliance with these legal prescriptions by means of inspectors [...] it is another completely different thing to designate the State as the educator of the people! Far from this: what should be done is to keep schools separated from all influences of the government and the Church [...] (Marx, 1985:27)".

Here, the distinction between the State as guarantor for the functioning of schools and the State as educator is evident, along with freeing people simultaneously from the Church and State, a proposition that exceeds the current situation. Today, it can be seen that most of the schools are under the privatization scheme which in one way is good if it is monitored well to avoid the capitalistic exploitation in terms of profit maximization.

The Marxst concept of education proposes omnilateral shaping for humankind. This is therefore a radically humanistic educational proposal but which cannot be taken for granted when one seeks to make modern education more relevant. Thus, Marxsm operates on the principle that individuals' bodies and spirituality need to develop harmoniously and concomitantly people do not consist only of a material body and, even less so, they cannot be reduced only to dependent subjectivity, for example to a teleological view of the surrounding world.

Karl Marx made it clear in most of his writings that "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" and what he meant by life was actual living everyday material activity. Human thought or consciousness was rooted in human activity not the other way round as a

⁶ The Gotha Program was the name given to the party platform adopted by the nascent German Social Democratic Party (SPD) at its initial party congress, held in the town of Gotha in 1875. The program called for universal suffrage, freedom of association, limits on the working day, and for other laws protecting the rights and health of workers. The Gotha Program was explicitly socialist: "the socialist labor party of Germany endeavors by every lawful means to bring about a free state and a socialistic society, to effect the destruction of the iron law of wages by doing away with the system of wage labor, to abolish exploitation of every kind, and to extinguish all social and political inequality.

number of philosophers felt at the time. What this meant was the way we went about our business, the way we were organized in our daily life was reflected in the way we thought about things and the sort of world we created. The institutions we built social, economic or political, the philosophies we adhered to, the prevailing ideas of the time, the culture of society, were all determined to some extent or another by the economic structure of society.

The education system is all rooted in the class nature of society, which in turn was a reflection of the economic base. The education system, as part of the superstructure, therefore, was a reflection of the economic base and served to reproduce it. This did not mean that education and teaching was a sinister plot by the ruling class to ensure that it kept its privileges and its domination over the rest of the population. There were no conspirators hatching devious schemes. It simply meant that the institutions of society, like education, were reflections of the world created by human activity and that the ideas arose from and reflected the material conditions and circumstances in which they were generated.

This is why Louis Althusser (a Marxst) (1971) argued that the main role of education in a capitalist society was the reproduction of an efficient and obedient work force. This is achieved through schools:

- 1. Transmitting the ideology that capitalism is just and reasonable (school teaches you to compete with your fellow pupils by trying to do better than them)
- Train future workers to become submissive to authority (schools teachers you to accept as normal to do as you're told, this way when your boss orders you what to do, it seems perfectly normal)

Contemporary schools have not been an exception to this as they all aim to achieve the above aims. However, the aims of education should move far beyond these two as we already discussed.

The students must learn the fundamental principles of science. In Marxst education labour and work are considered as parts. A workman cannot work properly unless he possesses a sound health. Hence physical education is considered as an important aim in Marxst education.

Marxst view on education also aims at cultural and aesthetic development. Marxst education further aims at indoctrination in communist and socialist values. Marxst education aims at creating creative, productive and faithful citizenship. According to Lenin, education is an integral part of culture and education and both are shaped by socio-economic conditions. In Marxst educational philosophy the child is given the central position. We should note that Individual aim and social aim of education go independently. Both are opposing to each other. It is not in reality. Neither the individual nor the society can exist. The individual is the product of the society while society finds its advancement in the development of its individual member. Individual cannot develop in vacuum. According to John Adams, "Individuality requires a social grow." And T.P. Nunn says," Individuality develops medium to in social environment."According to James Ross, "The aim of education is the development of valuable personality and spiritual individuality." The true aim of education cannot be other than the highest development of the individual as a member of society. Let education burn the individual flame, feeding it with the oil of society.

If one looks at the contemporary education system, societies have good and learned teachers to impart students with knowledge of what they know. Every one is a master in his field. The children are getting taught by professionals of their field. Presently the education is based on making people to be the best in our area of interest, to help us reach our goals more easily. More of the fact based knowledge is being grasped by all people. What people learn helps them in our career and in our profession. Professionalism is deep-rooted in our society now and this education makes us so. But on one hand, this is also the weakness of this education today as it confines us.

Skill-development and vocational education has added a new feather to the modern system of education. There is something to learn for everyone. Even an infant these days goes to a kindergarten. And a little grown, mentally and physically is promoted to a Montessori. Everything is being categorized, be it a primary, middle, a higher secondary or graduate school. We have temples of education known by a familiar word the "university".

Albert Einstein once said "Education is that which remains, if one has forgotten everything one learned in school".

However, we must remember that our education is confined to schools and colleges. It has become a process of spoon feeding. "Spoon feeding in the long run teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon" were the words of E.M.Forster. We are being fed with facts and knowledge. Not art, not books, but life itself is the true basis of teaching and learning. Cramming of facts and dates, hi-fi mathematical formulas, theories and doctrines should be at college levels when one has chosen his area of interest. What will the history pay a doctor or a mathematician, or medical terms to a historian?

On the other hand, an art can only be learned from a workshop of those who are earning their bread from it. Modern education has spread more ignorance than knowledge. Most of the women even don't know, where, the fabric they are wearing, came from. The word "How" is missing in our world which causes ignorance to students in the long run.

"Education...has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading." says G. M. Trevelyan.

Not to forget the fact that all education is bad which is not self-education. Presently, children after school are sent to tuitions. This is a clear question mark on the ability of school teacher. Homework tutorials are mushrooming up in our society. Students are thought of like they can't do anything on their own and so are sent even to do the homework. Our schoolings got a lot of loop-holes. They guide us through a well catered pathway which finally leads to professionalism. Homework is a waste of time, if it is to repeat class work done today or to be repeated as class work to be done tomorrow. Our schooling does not leave us with time to get educated.

Mark Twain once said that,

"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education".

Upon the above, our child's normal routine has become to wake up early, brush up their minds with light reading, go to school, then go to tuition and finally come home and do the homework.

Finally our education is producing machines out of pupil. They read books, they speak books and they do books. The above therefore shows the Marxst conception of education and how this enables one to make sense out of the present education institutions as well as systems. Seeing the link helps us to understand the nature and scope of education and how thsis can help solve the problems of the day.

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