

# **Title: Is Marxist Theory Still Relevant to Contemporary Education?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Chapters**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Lit Review
- 3 Marx's Definition of Class
- 4 Poverty and Education
- 5 Class, inequality and education
- 6 Education as a domain of capitalist contradictions
- 7 Appraisal and conclusions

Marx himself wrote little directly on education but a great deal on areas of society relevant to it. The aim of this dissertation is to see whether concepts developed from his theories can provide a satisfactory account of contemporary education. The focus will be chiefly on secondary education in Britain. An account of this based on secondary materials will be used to assess the relevance of concepts derived from a Marxist framework, but enough reference will be made to other levels of education and other states to demonstrate an understanding that secondary education in Britain is not necessarily typical of capitalist education in general.

In the Introduction I shall consider various areas of Marxist theory which could be applied to education, notably class, alienation and economic theory. It will be argued that class analysis has the most direct application to education, and the focus of the dissertation will be on that area. This is the project's solution to the diversity of possibilities within Marxism: the focus will be on class and structural analysis rather than on humanistic Marxism, analytical Marxism etc. The Literature Review, therefore, will focus on i. basic work by Marx and on Marx's class theory; ii. accounts which claim to explain contemporary education in Marxist terms; iii. accounts of secondary education in Britain. In the chapter on Marx's definition of class I shall review Marx's theory of class and criticisms of it on the basis both of the society Marx lived in and on the basis of subsequent developments, notably the growth of the middle class. This chapter will argue that to some extent the concepts of poverty and of inequality can be used as surrogates for Marx's class theories, but will also show the limitations of this. In Chapter 4 I shall look at the issue of poverty and education. Poverty has some overlap with the working class, and there is an existing literature which discusses the interrelation of poverty and education. In Chapter 5 I shall consider the issue of education and equality: does Marxist theory demand equality in education? Does contemporary education in some sense encourage equality? Is it meritocratic? To what extent are existing inequalities attributable to education? In Chapter 6 I shall turn to the question of the demands made by different groups of capitalists on the educational system. These are probably not compatible: MacDonald's and Microsoft place different and probably incompatible demands on education. And these demands are mediated through the state and negotiated to some extent with teachers and parents. There is no general consensus on the degree to which education facilitates the growth of capitalist economies, and thus on the appropriate level of state funding for education.

My conclusions will appraise these themes and briefly consider whether education has a role to play in developing a socialist future.