Critical Realism for Marxist Sociology of Education: A Book Review Symposium

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Introductory remarks:

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Grant Banfield's Critical Realism for Marxist Sociology of Education was launched at the International Conference on Critical Education 2016 (ICCE). The argument that it propagates is that critical realism can offer tremendous potential for serious Marxist scholars interested in revolutionary practice, and this book is intended to establish that aim.

First wave Critical Realism is a philosophy of social science operating at a meta level of abstraction, and Banfield's book specifies this for developing Marxist sociology of education. It is the very first book of its kind bringing together

Critical Realism, Marxism and education, and it was shortlisted for, both, the prestigious International Association of Critical Realism's (IACR) Cheryl Frank Memorial Prize; and also, The Australian Sociological Association's Stephen Crook Memorial Prize biennial award for the best book. Given this diverse and significant recognition, and its stated aim, the book merits wider reading by Marxist, sociologists, and educationalists – and this review symposium is designed to help with breaking that ground given JCEP'S readership.

There are three contributors who are all established Marxists working within education, and come with various interests. Spyros Themelis's (University of East Anglia, UK) research is concerned with social mobility, social class, and minority groups particularly Gypsy/Roma/Traveller peoples, as well as Global South social movements. Gail Edwards (Newcastle University, UK) is an expert in issues of realism, objectivity and standpoint theory, as well as Vygotskian pedagogy. Dennis Beach (University of Gothenburg, Sweden) is a leading international intellectual in the ethnography of education, and also the development of multi-site ethnography, especially in relation to influencing critical scholarship. These esteemed reviewers provide their view of the efficacy of the book in crafting a productive relationship between critical realism and Marxism for revolutionary education and practice; as well providing provocations and criticisms.

By way of introduction to the main reviews, as the instigator (and a JCEPS editor) of this article, I offer some preamble remarks. Banfield's book addresses some herculean problematics in the philosophy of social science, sociology, and Marxism; including tricky questions about: determinism and relativism, the correspondence principle, the base superstructure metaphor, the relationship between structure and agency. This address is achieved by utilising critical realism as a philosophy of social science to *underlabour* Marxism. The term

underlabour is central to understanding Banfield's critical realist intervention on the terrain of Marxism. Banfield is a Marxist who recognises some debilitating philosophical conundrums for Marxist sociology of education, the first part of the book is compelling and seminal reading in laying these out. It is in this context that conceptual ground clearing is rendered necessary (e.g. the limits of post/neo turns from Western Marxism) for effective practice – this is *underlabouring*. Therefore and importantly, critical realism is deployed at the *meta-level* rendering it a servant for Marxism's theoretical architecture providing conceptual clarity, not a threat to it and its practical application for revolutionary practice. In terms of underlabouring, critical realism invokes an anti-positivist naturalism, thus opening the possibility of a Marxist methodology akin to scientific inquiry like in the natural sciences that seeks to go beyond appearance. Secondly, it invokes taking ontology seriously. Vis-à-vis the bedevilment of philosophical problems, some Marxist's have retreated to forms of anti-naturalism (hermeneutics, phenomenology, and interpretivism) and/or positivism (determinism, and reductionism). To alleviate these moves that limit the revolutionary capacity of Marxism, ontology is prioritised (at the expense of prioritisation of epistemology), and it is a deep ontology that is stratified, differentiated and emergent. Banfield advocates a philosophy for Marxism that is concerned with going deeper than what meets the eye and exists in theoretical description, and emphasises exploring for mechanisms that create non-deterministic conditions for tendencies for consciousness and practices in a complex world with history. Marxism treated as a science like this strengthens its revolutionary capacity by tightening the analytical unity between theory (epistemology) and reality (deep ontology) with the latter usurping the former. Quite simply, emancipation is at stake according to Banfield's Marxist sociology of education, and with its critical realist underlabouring the book is a game changer. But reading it is not 'easy' and requires scholarly labour to appreciate and digest the fullness of what it offers.

Dennis Beach, Professor of Education at the Department of Education and Special Education, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

This book should become central reading in what remains of the discipline of sociology of education as it provides a much needed methodological and analytic realist resolution to thorny issues that have troubled this discipline, and seem likely to continue to do so, not the least as seen from a Marxist horizon. It is in two broad parts. The first describes the past and current field of Marxist Sociology of Education and the second presents critical realist tools relating to the central problematics therein. Bhaskar's critical realism (first wave) is quite rightly the central tool for appreciating and finding a solution to these problematics.

Starting from the assessment that Marx bequeathed two research programmes; one in terms of economic relations and one super-structural (political and cultural); part one has three chapters. Chapter 1 provides a valuable essential entry point for the book and I feel should be read as positioned; i.e. first; and also quite possibly twice; particularly by readers who are less familiar with central Marxist analytical concepts and themes. This is firstly as an orientation in Marx's extensive scholarly production and secondly concerning the interpretation and analysis of the twin roles of Marxist analysis. Following on from chapter 1, chapter 2 explores the central ideas of Western Marxism. Two themes are identified. These are firstly the move to return Marx to Hegel, not the least by recourse to the writings of György Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, and secondly the rejection of Hegel. The writings of Louis Althusser and his assertion about Marxism as a philosophy that is thoroughly distinct from Hegel are given attention here. Althusser argued that the mania for Hegel was a bourgeois attempt to combat Marxism and as suggested in the present book this recognition is highly significant for and important to the sociology of education

today. Hegel's politics, epistemology, and understanding of subjectivity offers little that is positive to those of us who are interested in understanding class politics and contributing to societal transformation. Part one concludes with chapter three, where further important trajectories of Marxist thought in the sociology of education are introduced.

Part two begins with chapter 4. This chapter outlines the three specific features of the theoretical architecture of Bhaskar's critical realism: namely transcendental realism, critical naturalism, and explanatory critique. It then provides an explication of his naturalist argument that the social sciences are sciences should be analysed and used in the same way as the natural sciences are, in that they both seek an in-depth explanation of their knowledge object. The idea of trans-factual depth realism is introduced. Trans-factual depth realism is important in social analysis as it switches the attention of science from social events to social mechanisms that operate at deep ontological levels. The important realist distinction between structures in relation to the critical realist concept of explanatory critique are introduced here along with the aim of critical realist analysis to provide an emancipatory impulse to social science as a tool for challenging oppression and exploitation through the exposure of false beliefs and cognitive errors that ideologically reinforce the status quo as a step on the way to educational and societal transformation.

Chapter 5 provides a re-reading of the base–superstructure model in Marxist sociology of education. It reintroduces this model as an interpretative one that can be used to understand capitalist relations and the generative mechanisms that are co-determining (i.e. in 'horizontal' historical contingency) and determining (i.e. in 'vertical' natural necessity) features in the unfolding of everyday lives and circumstances. This interpretation stands as a refreshing revitalization against common determinist and reductionist accounts of

Marxism. The chapter uses *Schooling in Capitalist America* as an animating moment giving impulse to the field's reductive naturalist and anti- naturalist tendencies and concludes that, while the base–superstructure model should be retained as an explanatory metaphor for historical materialism, the functionalism that is often attributed to it is contradictory and ontologically at odds with emancipatory Marxism. This is in my view, although well-known amongst Marxists today, an important point to make, which is also well illustrated through the examples given. The contradictions of emancipatory Marxism by determinist interpretations are both ontological and epistemological.

Although not indicated directly in the book, this critique of determinism is well in line with Althusser's aleatory materialism. This is about an alternative to the functionalistic ascriptions by determinists Marxists with a theory of knowledge in which the subject, by means of observations and abstraction, can come to know what an object (including the human subject in its full freedom, or the economy) really and truly is. From this perspective, the truths that social science produces do not identify essences. On the contrary, they are contingent metaphysical propositions that are true only insofar as they have an explanatory or practical value that stands in opposition to those of other competing truths. In full agreement with the assertions in the present book, in a revolutionary perspective this involves examining a social or political order with an awareness of its contingency and in terms of the possibility of its transformation rather than from the functionalist perspective of the necessity of a particular political order and the identification of the conditions of its true contradiction.

In the above way, instead of trying to provide an extensive historiography of the field Marxist sociology of education the book takes examples and discusses examples that are illustrative of larger issues or are explications of deeper

historical rhythms and movements. Chapter 6 is a fine example. It focuses on the relation between social structures and human agents vis-à-vis people as makers of history but not under circumstance they choose or fully control, and not always in ways of their own choosing. It develops observations that the field has grappled with this problem, but has tended to provide either over-socialized or over- agentised accounts of social life. Margaret Archer's morphogenetic approach the structure–agency relation is presented here as an analytic dualism that is able to advance the argument that interests are a bridgehead between structure and agency and can provide a basis for an ethical naturalism as a revolutionising practice. This is a materialist Marxism that both endorses the scientific method as the best way for understanding ourselves and our potential, but that also understands that this method is still fallible. It is a method for thinking inside and about the culture we at one and the same time both analyse and inhabit in order to also try to affect and change that culture.

Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour* (henceforth LtoL) is then specifically employed to illuminate the tensions around the structure–agency problematic further. However, here I have some disagreement with Banfield's assertions, as rather than recognizing that Willis's work is specifically done at one and the same time inside and about the culture we both analyse and inhabit, a rush to critique Willis's writing is constructed using the classical Marxist insistence on the determinacy of class relations and objective class interests and the fact that Willis ignored these in *Learning to Labour*. The critique is that there is a tendency to conflate structure and agency at the level of praxis in Willis work, rather than to conceptualise structure and agency as ontologically distinct. An observable ambivalence is said to exist in Willis' work towards the essential nature of class due to an ontological shyness.

I don't fully agree with this and feel instead that the evidence provided for the critique is not so convincing with respect to Willis's writing in LtoL. However, ontological shyness does, I think, apply more generally to much educational ethnography of the period (the seventies and early eighties) in the sociology of education. Even the work of Stephen Ball (Beachside, 1981) may fit here by openly bracketing ontology in its analytical turns, in line with the interactionist tenets of the Manchester School of educational ethnography this work was part of.

I don't see this critique as applying quite as well to the Birmingham School tradition of which Willis's work was a part. More in line with the eminent British social researcher Martyn Hammersley, my suggestion is that the Birmingham School applied a Marxist (and later Marxist-feminist) approach to the study of culture, using ethnography and other methodologies, and that this (although not openly asserted by the author) also applied to LtoL as well. Willis explicitly analysed a counter-culture arising amongst working-class boys in school and its relationship with the culture of their parents that helped channel these boys into working class jobs. The active agency of the boys within existing structural conditions were analysed as one mechanism among many contemporary ones contributing toward maintaining the capitalist social order.

The issue of LtoL aside, Banfield's book does what it sets out to do. It describes the challenges of the field of sociology of education from a Marxist standpoint and shows how critical realism can work as a conceptual under-labourer and methodological frame within this field by advancing an anti-positivist naturalism that can guide an analysis beyond the polarised philosophies of positivism and hermeneutics and structure and agency. These problems of naturalism and structure– agency serve as the book's marker of persistent conceptual tensions; and rightly so; with this identifying historical materialism

as the 'guiding thread' of Marxian analytical praxis in Marxist Sociology of Education. This establishes historical materialism as a non- reductive materialism that is essential to an emancipatory sociology of education as (i) transcendental, (ii) critical naturalist, (iii) ethically naturalist and capable of (iv) helping to revolutionise social practices. It recognises that simply having knowledge of a conceptual terrain is not enough. Social transformation also requires knowledge of the social and historical conditions out of which a field emerges.

In the above ways the book by Banfield provides important operational illuminations of Marxist Sociology of Education and how the field has inherited thorny issues from its history. It opens-up the gravitas of Marxist thought in this field to critical naturalist ground clearing along the lines of Bhaskar's critical realism that have haunted Marxism (e.g/i.e. economic reductionism, evolutionary determinism, positivism and the structure–agency problematic) around the relationships between people and their social worlds. These are issues that go to the heart of questions about social change in Marxist Sociology of Education from (and of course even before) *Knowledge and Control*, edited by Michael F. D. Young in 1971, Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America*, and Willis's *Learning to Labour*. They concern, as Banfield points out, the issue of how cultural agents (including possibly researchers themselves) might actively yet unknowingly reproduce and/or more consciously contribute to uncover, challenge and help to overthrow structures of oppression.

Gail Edwards, Lecturer and Programme Director MA Education Research, Newcastle University

Marxists are interested in the role education and schooling play in history and revolution. But classical Marxist studies in the sociology of education have

remained marginalised by mainstream, gloomy neo- and post-Marxist assessments of education's emancipatory potential. In this meticulously researched piece of scholarship, however, Grant Banfield brings Roy Bhaskar's critical realist philosophy to work as a redemptive conceptual intervention in the field. The result is a powerful rejoinder to those who have dismissed classical Marxism in the study of the relationship between education and the social order. It's important to the book's argument that we understand these post-Marxist and neo-Marxist sociologies of education as descendants of Western Marxism. Western Marxism emerged during the West's inter-war period. Antonio Gramsci, and later, George Lukács and Louis Althusser, laid the groundwork for the sociology of education's neo-Marxist turn in the 1970s, a classic of which in the UK is Paul Willis's 1977 *Learning to Labour*. Both neo-Marxism and post-Marxism entailed a decisive shift away from economic matters towards the cultural-philosophical Marx, prompting a reconceptualisation of class as social identity and rendering "classism" on a par with racism, ableism and sexism in maintaining educational discrimination.

The book's author notes the way neo- and post-Marxists justified this cultural turn. This was by reference to Marx's perceived methodological shortcomings such as his abstract object of study. Marx's object is not (as for monetarist or Keynesian economists) market exchange relations, but rather productive relations and forces operating *behind* reality's appearance. Given their unavailability to direct observation, it's easy for critics of Marx to question their existence—or at least the possibility of studying them. We can observe individuals, so their argument goes, but not abstractions like "the proletariat" or "capitalism".

The cultural turn also aroused suspicion of Marxists' claim to be scientific. It is widely seen as positivist folly to transfer natural science's method to the study

of the social world. Methodological naturalism has had a bad press at least since the turn of the 20th century when anti-positivists pointed out the unavailability of disinterested observation or objective laws. If Marxism is scientific, neo-Marxists and post-Marxists reason, then Marx must have posited mechanistic, historic-economic laws. Marxists' explanatory privileging of the economic base Vis-à-vis the politico-cultural superstructure must thus be "vulgar materialism" or "economic reductionism". Marxists, they say, deny human agency.
This book shows exactly why these objections rest on incorrect readings of Marx. It traces the errors to the intellectual terrain of European socialism at the end of the 19th century, a period dominated by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the orthodox Marxism of the 1889 Second International. Capitalist expansion and economic stability after the failed revolutions of 1848 and 1871 saw some leading left theoreticians capitulate to reformism, justified by their claim that Marx had discovered natural laws responsible for capitalism's inevitable evolution to socialism. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was considered a doomed attempt to violate Marxian science by imposing socialism from above. Of course, the subsequent period of capitalist crisis that led to two world wars brought no capitalist collapse and the Second International's mechanical evolutionism looked increasingly implausible. And the crimes associated with Stalin's crude materialism would later only add fuel to the revisionists' fire.

The leading New Left theoreticians of the inter-war and post-war period were obliged to explain what was going on. Their post-empiricist turn away from science was reinforced by the concurrent shift in social theory towards hermeneutics, phenomenology and interpretivism. Educationists will be familiar with the micro-sociology of epistemological radicals (such as Michael F D Young) of the New Sociology of Education. The post-war Keynesian consensus smoothed the way for economic and industrial downplaying in favour of

Weberian and neo-Durkheimian analyses. Capitalism's resilience and educational underachievement could be explained by reference to "reification", "restricted code", "habitus", "hegemony" and the social construction of curricula, race, sexuality, ability, gender and class.

What's really impressive about this book is that its author uses critical realism to show how reductionist this is. The economic and natural has been reduced to the social, the ontological to the epistemological, and political-economy to bourgeois democracy. There is, at best, a flat ontology conceptualising society as interactions between individuals embedded in a power matrix of intersecting identities with each person in some ways privileged and/or in other ways disadvantaged. This restricts analyses to the individual's power to define reality and is a form of ontological shyness which restricts reality to empirical phenomena—what humans can experience directly. Banfield recalls Marx's point that if appearance was all that there was to reality (the epistemic fallacy), there would be no need for human beings to practise science at all. Indeed, scientific observation is praxis-dependent because scientists are engaging in a social activity which seeks to understand the *underlying* properties of objects or mechanisms which *generate* the appearance of empirical patterns.

The book's achievement relies upon critical realism's depth ontology, the detail of which cannot be reproduced here but which is beautifully explicated. Banfield absolves the Marxist sociology of education of crude materialism by appeal to Marxian method, elaborated by reference to critical realism's "stratification" and "emergence". Properties and powers can *emerge* from reality's underlying *strata* but are not reducible to them. People's liabilities and powers are not determined by their biology, for example. Human reasons, intentions and consciousness emerge from, but are *not* reducible to, neurophysiological matter. Similarly, education systems emerge from an

economic base but are not reducible to it. The point is that systems rooted in any historically particular relations and forces of production emerge with *particular* properties, tendencies and powers. This is certainly not economic reductionism or vulgar materialism. These forces are determining but not determinist and their potentials can illuminate the relationship between education, society and the material world.

Ultimately the book aims at conceptual uncluttering to make way for revolutionising educational practice. It makes clear that historical materialism doesn't overlook culture or agency but rather takes capitalist structural relations to be both power-limiting and power-conferring. Contradiction arises out of an antagonistic social relation between the class which possesses the material tools to extract surplus value from production, and the working class who lack those means. The interests of profitability pressure capitalists to lower wages and use more efficient technology, while the interests of subsistence pressure workers to demand wage increases. Historical materialism can be understood within an emergent, stratified ontology which explains why workers' biological need for material well-being takes priority over loyalty to existing social relations. In other words, productive forces have material limits (epistemological, biological, technological, and natural) that restrict possibilities in terms of social relations (a relation that doesn't work the other way round). Those who accuse Marx of economic reductionism fail to understand that outlining agency's shape is not eliminating it. Insisting on the explanatory primacy of the economic merely specifies the particular form agency takes. Class is not an identity; it is an objective relation and therefore working-class power takes the *collective* shape of industrial action (given the power of labour withdrawal to adversely affect profits). Societal transformation is not guaranteed but rather contingent upon political organisation and cultural processes—whether or not for example, the

working class achieves sufficient class consciousness collectively to advance its interests at the expense of the capitalist class.

Therein lies the role of educators as mediators in class struggle, leading and learning from the development of social movements. It is their job, in other words, to join with other activists to ensure that revolutionary capacities and collective subjectivity are brought into being through struggle.

This is a ground-making book in the sociology of education. Hopefully, it will open up the field to a long overdue, serious engagement with classical Marxism. In my view, critical realism lacks historical materialism's explanatory power. But, in this excellent book, the author has certainly shown the former's potential for socialist teachers, researchers and students who want to defend the role of - education in revolution.

Spyros Themelis, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of East Anglia

Grant Banfield aims to offer a 'useful continuation of the dialogue between critical realism and Marxism' (p. 2). Specifically, the author provides a critical realist intervention in the field of Marxist Sociology of Education. This consists of a delicate underlabouring of Marxism with tools he borrows from critical realism.

The author has taken on the ambitious task of resolving some historical tensions and further linking the two areas of thinking, namely Marxism and critical realism. Banfield navigates with forcefulness and vigour between some of the most important yet controversial issues. In so doing, he clears out a lot of 'conceptual dust' that has settled on approaches over the years and has occluded vision both from within and outside of these fields.

The overarching approach of the book locates Banfield's analysis in the 'historicity and scientificity of Marxist praxis' (p. 8). This has a dual effect. First, it allows the author to position the book at the heart of what he calls the 'cleavage in Marxism', namely the economic and historical projects bequeathed by Marx. Second, it paves the way for a critical understanding of Marx and Marxism that Banfield pursues in the remainder of the book. Both of these effects operate at the level of the immediate and the explicit; for there is another level on which they operate and tacitly underpin Banfield's approach throughout the book. This points to the constant re-centering of the Marxist 'project' as a unified field of human thinking and acting. This re-centering effectively equates with the pursuit of a revolutionary praxis, which presupposes that Marxist education has to be 'consciously directed to the development of what can be called *sensuous explanatory critique*' (182) [emphasis in the original]. This critique, in turn, is the starting point in order to act in the present and change it in order to prepare for a better future. This, the author contents, is best achieved with a 'sensuous materialist pedagogy'. How is this done? First, by being aware that 'if there is a single message to be taken from historical materialism it is that the mode of production (with its power of, for example, technological innovation) has revolutionary predominance over social relations' (p. 183).

Second and pursuant from the previous point, by remembering that innovation is only achieved through human labour and, as such, it owes everything to labour power and its ingenuity. In other words, as human species, it is important at this juncture in our history to remember that the nature of our labour power can either help capital expand or reduce it to a historical relic. As the author argues 'if the revolutionary predominance of the mode of production is a fundamental message of historical materialism, then the lesson for Marxian educators appears obvious: education is to be directed to the production of revolutionary labour power' (183-4).

Herein lies the political message of the book, which is more pertinent than ever: education is not a field, an institution or a process in people's life. It is not a base nor a superstructure to return to one of the debates the author attends to consistently in his book. It is so much more than that! Education is no less important than production. In fact, Banfield argues that education can be viewed as a form of production: the production of revolutionary labour power.

Rather than settling scores with other approaches developed over the years to address similar issues, such as neo-Marxism, post-Marxism, post-structuralism and post-modernism, Banfield works with and through them. For example, he never rejects an argument or a position in order to advance his own. Rather he pulls out the most important threads from these other approaches in order to scrutinise them against Marx's own ideas and those of his successors. This weaving of diverse threads is set against a canvas of a strong ontological positioning of Banfield's own work. The author is assisted in this task by Bhaskar's critical realism. Banfield first clarifies what critical realism means to him and then moves on to discuss how he has found it useful in explaining issues of educational importance. It is at this point in particular that Banfield's approach can be read as an excellent meta-theoretical critique of some of the most influential works within what is broadly termed as Marxist sociology of education. Two prominent works are examined in some length under the lens of a scholar who will not rest until justice is done both to the ideas in hand but also to the field of scientific inquiry that hosts them. For example, Banfield teases out some central arguments from Willis's (1977) celebrated 'Learning to Labour' and Bowles and Gintis' (1976) 'Schooling in Capitalist America'. With razor-sharp precision he dissects the main tenets of these studies before he moves on to offer a well-supported assessment of their implications. Banfield is not satisfied by simply delivering one-dimensional or simplistic criticisms. Rather, he offers an assessment that evolves at three levels:

a. The factual, that is to say what the authors of these works have to say about the issues in hand. For example, how Willis approaches the issue of agency and structure and what reasons he offers for the approach he pursues is what Banfield presents first.

b. The evaluative, that is the reactions the original work has generated and the assessments offered by other scholars. At this level, Banfield opens up a theoretical dialogue with other authors and the arguments that, say 'Schooling in Capitalist America', has attracted. This is not merely a demonstration of argument and counter-argument, position and juxtaposition. Rather, it is an informed debate that aims to help the reader understand what issues are at stake, both epistemologically and ontologically.

c. The meta-theoretical level. This consists of the consideration of the broader implications the works studied by Banfield and the attendant debates have had on the field of sociology of education as well as on the philosophy of knowledge. In other words, if Willis stresses the role of cultural repertoires over structural locations, what kind of knowledge is produced by this emphasis? What kind of 'socialisation' into the field of sociology of education is achieved? On the other hand, what happens when agents disappear or are less visible than the structures within which their actions are located? How is revolutionary praxis achieved through works that over-emphasise structure or culture? Crucially, what is the impact of either approach in our understanding of and participation in the field of sociology of education? How is a Marxist sociology of education possible when different strands within it might make it difficult to recognise its salient Marxist features? Banfield would reply that no one needs to save Marxism. Rather he would favour a more sophisticated answer that seeks to unite not only agents with structures, but also frameworks for their understanding and our ideas about them with a historical materialist conception.

Banfield's account is a constant underlabouring of the natural with the social and a tender re-centering of ontology. Against a tendency prevalent in 1970s sociology of education to offer either a determinist account of educational inequalities or an over-phenomenological and interpretivist account of daily experiences, Banfield shines some much needed light onto the deeper realities of people and their lives. These realities, if they are to be treated with care and explored in their multiplicity and complexity, they need an approach that draws on Bhaskar's stratified, differentiated and emergently real ontology. This approach, according to Banfield, offers the best of both worlds: Bhaskar's naturalist model of abstraction and Marx's historical materialist method. Banfield's careful articulation of how this combination can be effectively achieved is where the analytical prowess of this work rests. In order to exemplify this combination, Banfield deals with elements of Giddens' structuration theory as well as with Archer's morphogenetic approach. While it is clear how Archer contributes to Banfield's analytical task, Giddens' inclusion is rather less clear. As a general theory of society and as an attempt to rearticulate or even transcend the agency versus structure debate, Giddens' approach certainly carries some weight. However, as an intervention within the field of sociology of education that Banfield is primarily interested in, one would have expected the inclusion of Bourdieu's or even Bernstein's ideas to be considered. Of course, this is not a weakness of the book, but a choice of approach that was left less well justified by the author.

Another aspect that could have received some attention by the author is the lack of consideration of more recent works in the field of sociology of education – Marxist, Marxian, post-Marxist, interpretivist and functionalist – and the ways they deal with the classical and new debates Banfield is concerned with. For example, what does Banfield's approach have to say about some recent re-articulations of old debates? The works of Stephen Ball, Sharon Gewirtz, Sally

Power, Geoff Whitty, Fiona Devine, Mike Savage are only but a few such recent contributions to the debates Banfield has copiously presented. Not that we should expect the author to closely inspect every such work. Far from that, even a cursory assessment of the general direction of the field of sociology of education would have sufficed. It is my contention that the field Banfield is concerned with has been enriched by the works of Marxist, post-Marxist and non-Marxist scholars alike over the last 30 years. Banfield would agree but there is still a curious omission from his account of these studies and the effect they have had on the sociology of education and the broader field of scientific inquiry he is concerned with. What is more, the effect of these works on the attendant field and knowledge produced seems to me to be of far greater importance than that of Willis' and Bowles and Gintis' classical studies. In our days, practitioners and scholars alike seem to be more aware of Ball's rather than Willis' work. Activists within education seem to read Klein (2007), Agamben (1993; 2005), Hardt and Negri (2000; 2005) and Graeber (2011) rather than Bowles and Gintis. In my research with education activists in Latin America, Greece and the UK, they would say that they were reading texts that could help them understand the world in order to change it. Their readings included works also produced in the South. For example, it could be argued that in Brazil the MST has challenged the conceptual, epistemological and theoretical frameworks of Western epistemology and has produced knowledge that is attuned to the experiences and realities of people living in the South. While Western Marxism is still respected and utilised, it is at the same time reworked and updated to include knowledge produced by community activists and members of grassroots organisations. A shift is gradually registered from theorising people's daily experiences to the theorisation of life with the 'everyday people'. The scholar is gradually spending more time in the community rather than in the ivory tower. Increasingly the scholar is the 'lay person' or is assisted by the collectivity where s/he lives, works and acts. Hardt

and Negri (2005) conceptualised this as the multitude, others as the social movements from below (Cox and Nielsen, 2014). I wonder how critical realism could be updated to take stock of the realities of modern social movements and the knowledge they produce. How, for example, could a Marxist sociology of education use Bhaskarian tools to illuminate the struggles of the Occupy Movement or the Arab uprisings? Crucially, how could a historical materialist-informed underlabouring of social movements offer hope to the struggling subjects, to those who strive for emancipation? This is an important question, because, as Freire (1970/2006) underlined, it is in the pedagogy of the oppressed where we can find the cues to our emancipation.

However, this does not take away from the value of the book, which has to be judged for what it does rather than for what it does not do. Despite the fact that Banfield considers complex ideas and works back and forth with them (and underneath them, as he would put it) he does not prevaricate when it comes to a thorny issue. For example, the reader of such a work would immediately start thinking about the shortcomings in Marx's approach and the failure of Marxian thinkers to address them. Would Banfield respond to those or dismiss them as exaggerated and biased, as has been the case with Marxist and Marxian scholarship in the past? It transpires that Banfield is not posing as a Marxist apologist but as a critical realist scholar who is committed to the improvement of Marxist sociology of education. However, this effort is not a means in itself. What makes it worthwhile for the author is the possibility of emancipation, which can best be achieved through a critical realist underlabouring of Marxism.

The scholarship of the book is sound and it is based on a rigorous analytical and critical approach. The text is very dense in some places, though, to an extent, this is justified by the complexity of the issues considered. For example, it is

hard to reconcile critical realism with historical materialism without some degree of abstraction and analytical elevation. However, there is a need to keep philosophy and sociological theorising where it belongs: to the people who make their own history (no matter if they choose the circumstances in which this history is made or not). The book makes for a thought-provoking reading and a much-needed addition both to critical realism and Marxist sociology of education.

Banfield demonstrates that being analytically bold does not involve a rejection of all past accounts nor a paralysis before the inherent complexity of social phenomena and their theorisation. If anything, Banfield paves the way for an imaginative, analytically-robust, radical exit from the impasse of essentialism, reductionism, functionalism (Marxist or otherwise) and epistemological approaches that are ontologically unwarranted. What this can help create is the conditions for the development of theories that are full of explanatory power rather than merely epistemological sophistication. In the aftermath of post-all theories and the often unproductive conflict within Marxist scholarship, a turn to ontologically rich, and epistemologically robust approaches is to be commended. However, achieving this is harder done than said. Banfield's book proves that it is possible.

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