



**Marx and Education, Jean Anyon. New York: Routledge.  
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**Reflecting on a scholar's theoretical influences: A review of  
Jean Anyon's Marx and  
Education.**

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9 Reflecting on a scholar's theoretical influences: A review of Jean Anyon's Marx and  
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11 Education.

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18 Finally, a U.S. scholarly education book that actually uses the "M" word in its  
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20 title. While common in British education discourse, the use of "Marx" in an  
21  
22 American title is typically an invitation to irrelevance. The ripples of McCarthyism  
23  
24 are still felt within the American educational research community. Not only is the  
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26 political Right monitoring academics' ideologies, many critical race and feminist  
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28 scholars have marginalized Marxist scholarship in education as white and male, and  
29  
30 therefore to be avoided. Nevertheless, there is much in Marxist theory that is still  
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32 relevant, and, in the wake of the latest crisis of capitalism, some would argue more  
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34 relevant than ever. Furthermore, a new generation of education scholars have had  
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36 little if any exposure to Marxist thought. Jean Anyon may have the credentials to re-  
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38 legitimate Marxist thought to this new generation. In addition, along with Pauline  
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40 Lipman, her work is exemplary in insisting on keeping issues of race and gender on  
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42 a par with issues of political economy.

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49 On the other hand, to see this as only a book about Marxism is to  
50  
51 misunderstand the challenge that Anyon faced in writing it, and to invite criticisms  
52  
53 focused on what's missing instead of what's there. In spite of its title, Anyon's book  
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55 is not intended to be a comprehensive scholarly book on Marxism and education.  
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3 For an in depth discussion of Marxism and education, consult the work of Richard  
4 Brosio (1994) or Michael Cole (2008). In addition, McGrew (2011) has a useful  
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6 review that supplements the Marxist concepts that Anyon focuses on in her book.  
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9  
10 What makes this book, and the book series of which it is a part, most interesting is  
11  
12 the inside peek we get at how a scholar was influenced by a particular theory and  
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14 how it influenced her career's work. In this sense, it is crucial to understand that  
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17 Anyon includes in this short book only those concepts and authors that have been  
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19  
20 influential in her own work.  
21

22  
23 This book is part of an innovative new Routledge book series in which the  
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25 authors are asked to take up the ways that a particular theorist has informed their  
26  
27 own work and the theorist's relevance for current and future work in the field.  
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30 Anyon was chosen to discuss Marx on the basis of the centrality of Marxist theory to  
31  
32 her own work. These books are meant to be short, intimate accounts by leading  
33  
34 theorists. The only other book listed in the series so far is one on Freud and  
35  
36 education written by Deborah Britzman.  
37

38  
39 To do a fair review of this book, it is important to acknowledge that Anyon's  
40  
41 audience is not other neo-Marxist scholars. This is meant to be a primer for new  
42  
43 scholars and to provide insight into how a seasoned scholar uses social theory to  
44  
45 frame her work. It is also a venue for reviewing the life's work of a scholar, and  
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47  
48 Anyon is not a scholar who writes essentially the same book over and over. Her  
49  
50 early work looked at correspondence and social reproduction theory. Her study of  
51  
52 Newark, brought a socio-historical frame to how a district deteriorated over time.  
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56 *Radical Possibilities* demonstrates the limitations of education policy for social  
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3 change and the need for political organizing and a focus on social policies. Such an  
4  
5 overview, with attention to how Marxism influenced her along the way, provides  
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7 important insights for new scholars.  
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11 While Marxism and education is discussed by social foundations scholars at  
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13 the American Educational Studies Association, the Marxist Special Interest Group at  
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15 AERA or even smaller gatherings like the Rouge Forum, it seldom rises to  
16  
17 prominence at more mainstream education conferences or in major academic  
18  
19 journals. Having published scholarship (e.g. *Ghetto Schooling*, *Radical Possibilities*)  
20  
21 that is widely read, Anyon is harder for mainstream scholars to ignore. The  
22  
23 appearance of this book is an opportunity to bring Marxist theory out of the  
24  
25 shadows and back alleys of academia, and perhaps encourage veteran scholars to  
26  
27 use the term more freely, and newer scholars to take a look at a rich theoretical  
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29 tradition that they might otherwise be steered away from.  
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35 Most scholars are not accustomed to talking about their own work in print,  
36  
37 much less their personal lives. This is because we've been taught to keep ourselves  
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39 out of our research, and perhaps because none of us wants to be accused of self-  
40  
41 promotion. This discomfort comes through on occasion as Anyon tries to find an  
42  
43 appropriate authorial voice. While Anyon alludes to her early activism and her turn  
44  
45 to cognitive psychology, it would have been interesting to hear more about what led  
46  
47 her to Marx (since this was not part of her doctoral work), and how she managed to  
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49 do such radical work at a time when it was unfashionable to do radical scholarship  
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51 in education.  
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4 It is helpful though to have her summarize in some detail her early  
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6 curriculum research, since many younger scholars may not be familiar with it. Her  
7  
8 discussions of *Ghetto Schooling* and *Radical Possibilities* were also effectively  
9  
10 integrated. Overall, Anyon has taken an extremely difficult writing task and  
11  
12 provided a personalized primer on how one education scholar has integrated  
13  
14 Marxist ideas in her scholarship.  
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### 17 18 **From the Correspondence Principal to Intersectionality.** 19

20 The first two chapters of Anyon's book are divided into two periods: 1970s to  
21  
22 1980s and 1990-2005. Chapter three deals with contemporary economic and policy  
23  
24 issues and chapter four with extending Marxist theory. In this section, I will take up  
25  
26 the first chapter, which describes how the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) on the  
27  
28 role of schooling in reproducing social class within capitalism was taken up at the  
29  
30 classroom level by researchers, mainly Anyon, doing field research in classrooms  
31  
32 and schools. Drawing on Marx, Bowles and Gintis's (1976) "correspondence  
33  
34 principal" argued that there was a correspondence between schooling and the social  
35  
36 relations of production in the work place. If the correspondence principal were true,  
37  
38 then schools—whether wittingly or unwittingly—were serving a social  
39  
40 reproductive function. That is, they served to reproduce a stratified work force  
41  
42 whose members were taught to accept their class position. To test this theory of  
43  
44 correspondence, Anyon studied fifth grade classrooms in different schools, each  
45  
46 serving students from different social class backgrounds. Her findings so  
47  
48 impressively documented the class-based differences in the cultural capital that  
49  
50 students were receiving that her two academic articles were widely cited (Anyon,  
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3 1980, 1981) and influenced a generation of critical ethnographers and curriculum  
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5 scholars.  
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8 Besides Bowles and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Anyon cites Henry  
9  
10 Giroux and Michael Apple as being early influences. Apple's influence was indeed  
11  
12 monumental during this period as he helped to lay the theoretical foundation for  
13  
14 three generations of critical research. While his neo-Marxist scholarship was  
15  
16 impressive and influential, often overlooked is his importance as a mentor for an  
17  
18 astounding number of doctoral students who produced critical ethnographic  
19  
20 dissertations from the 1970s until the present.  
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25 Anyon's critical research so starkly stands out during this period because she  
26  
27 was nearly alone among Americans in providing empirical evidence of the  
28  
29 mechanisms of social reproduction on the ground. Her fieldwork was done in the  
30  
31 late 1970s and published in 1980-81, before there was even a name for what later  
32  
33 became known as critical ethnography. It is likely that she was gathering data  
34  
35 around the same time that the Birmingham Schools' Paul Willis was writing his  
36  
37 classic British ethnography, *Learning to Labour*, which appeared in print in 1977.  
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42 While space considerations likely caused Anyon to avoid a discussion of  
43  
44 British Neo-Marxist research, British cultural Marxists not only documented, like  
45  
46 Anyon, the correspondences between schooling and the economy, but in the process  
47  
48 created the field of cultural studies that, among other things, studied the complex  
49  
50 forms of accommodation and resistance that occur at the cultural level. Anyon  
51  
52 acknowledges the influence of British scholars like, Paul Willis, Michael Young,  
53  
54 Roger Dale, Geoff Whitty, Stuart Hall, and Madeline Arnot. This flowering of neo-  
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3 Marxist educational research in Britain in the 1970s should not be surprising, since  
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6 Marxism in Britain did not experience the same McCarthyist attacks that has made  
7  
8 most American scholars shy away from Marxism even decades later.  
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11 Although not mentioned by Anyon as influences, Angela McRobbie's (1978)  
12  
13 work applied resistance theory (which was formulated by the Birmingham scholars,  
14  
15 not Giroux, who often was given credit for it in the U.S.) to working class British  
16  
17 girls. Sharp and Green (1975) provided an influential critical ethnography of the  
18  
19 reproductive tendencies of progressive teaching methods, that predated a similar,  
20  
21 but non-Marxist, critique by Lisa Delpit and others in the U.S. Corrigan's (1979)  
22  
23 *Schooling the Smash Street Kids* was another of several books in this genre.  
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## 27 **Chapter 2: Neo-Marxism in Education, 1990-2005.**

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29  
30 In chapter two, Anyon discusses how neo-Marxist scholarship in education  
31  
32 struggled with—and continues to struggle with—the intersectionality of class, race,  
33  
34 gender, and sexual orientation. One of the central tenets of Marxism is the notion  
35  
36 that macro level economic regimes (The economic base) heavily influence what goes  
37  
38 on at the cultural level (the superstructure). Cultural Marxists have refined this  
39  
40 notion, adding greater nuance to the ways that these macro forces play out in  
41  
42 contradictory and often unpredictable ways around class, race, and gender at the  
43  
44 cultural level. Throughout her career Anyon has set out to understand the reciprocal  
45  
46 effects of macro and micro level policies, institutions, and structures, and to  
47  
48 encourage educational researchers to raise their gaze from the cultural to the  
49  
50 macro-contextual forces around schooling.  
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4 According to Neo-Marxists like Anyon, one of the things that contributes to  
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6 and legitimates current and growing levels of social inequality is the tendency of  
7  
8 educational researchers to focus their work on the district, school, classroom, and  
9  
10 individual levels, ignoring forces that are far more influential in determining the life  
11  
12 chances of poor children and children of color. While it is true that schools can also  
13  
14 in theory, change society, the reality is that they more often tend to reflect it. She  
15  
16 asserts in chapter two and elaborates in subsequent chapters, the idea that,  
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20       Expecting educational reform to fix the problems of the economy is quite a  
21  
22 conservative response to economic problems....Blaming the schools for  
23  
24 economic decline is like assuming that, for example, the decline of Detroit's  
25  
26 economy was caused by the poor educational achievement of Detroit  
27  
28 students (p.45).  
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32 She then ticks off all of the mistakes the auto industry made that have led to their  
33  
34 near demise, none of them relating to education. It was this tendency to focus on  
35  
36 the local that led her to write *Ghetto Schooling*, a book that placed the low levels of  
37  
38 student achievement in Newark in a broad socio-political and historical context.  
39  
40 Much like the popularity of her early work documenting correspondence theory in  
41  
42 classrooms, *Ghetto Schooling* was, by academic standards, a best seller,  
43  
44 demonstrating the hunger that exists for more holistic, multi-level analyses of  
45  
46 schooling.  
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51       *Ghetto Schooling* was unique in educational research in providing a broader  
52  
53 analysis of the decline of Newark's schools that focused on tax policies, corruption  
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55 and patronage, suburbanization and policies of racial containment, redlining by  
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3 banks, and other non-educational factors that lead to the ghettoization of the city  
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5 and its schools. In her next book, *Radical Possibilities*, a central theme is, again, the  
6  
7 notion that social policies, not education policies, are ultimately responsible for the  
8  
9 social inequalities that all educational researchers claim to be concerned about, but  
10  
11 largely seek answers to at the school, classroom, and individual level.  
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15 This is a message that educational policy-makers and educational  
16  
17 researchers do not want to hear. For every study like Anyon's, there are one-  
18  
19 hundred studies of how to make students and families more resilient or how to  
20  
21 teach middle class cultural capital to students to make them more competitive.  
22  
23 Often these studies that blame students and families are presented as social justice-  
24  
25 oriented. While no one would argue that there is anything wrong, per se, about  
26  
27 acquiring bridging capital or resiliency, such "solutions" leave the structural causes  
28  
29 of inequality unexamined and unchallenged.  
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35 Anyon suggests that the central skill that a thorough reading of Marx  
36  
37 provides, is an intuitive understanding that nothing is merely local, and that the  
38  
39 local or cultural level is permeated by dominant ideologies. Thus, the local is not so  
40  
41 much "determined" as influenced and, in part, constituted, by macro level structures  
42  
43 and forces. What Anyon does in her work is to concretely identify which groups and  
44  
45 individuals make up these forces.  
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50 Many of us, like Anyon, were social activists before we became academics.  
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52 Anyon's academic work has brought her full circle to a recognition that important  
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54 work at the classroom and school level must be linked with a broader social  
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3 movement, especially in an age of growing social inequality and capital  
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5 “accumulation by dispossession,” a concept she discusses in the last chapter.  
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### 8 **Extending Marxism**

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10 Anyon is dealing with very complex issues throughout the book, and in  
11  
12 general does a good job of condensing them without engaging in a form of  
13  
14 reductionism that distorts them. However, she tiptoes around a rather large  
15  
16 elephant the living room: What makes a critique “Marxist” instead of merely liberal  
17  
18 or progressive? The last two chapters deal with a shift in the political economy of  
19  
20 the U.S. and the world since the economic crisis of the 1970s and the  
21  
22 neoliberalization of school reform. While there is a growing critique of  
23  
24 Neoliberalism and its education policies like NCLB as misguided on several counts,  
25  
26 not every critique is Marxist, even when broadly defined.  
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32 Even a broad definition of Marxism would suggest that Marxists have a  
33  
34 critique of capitalism, not merely neoliberal or “late” capitalism. Marxists generally  
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36 critique Keynesian, welfare state models of capitalism as well as free-market,  
37  
38 deregulated models, while acknowledging their preference for the former as the  
39  
40 lesser evil. In an age of “Good capitalism, bad capitalism,” (Baumol, 2009) it is often  
41  
42 hard to distinguish a Marxist critique from a non-Marxist, but progressive critique.  
43  
44 This is a tension throughout the book, and while Anyon introduces the book with an  
45  
46 overview of basic Marxist concepts, a more in depth discussion of how she  
47  
48 distinguishes Marxist and non-Marxist social critique would have been helpful.  
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53 Making such distinctions is risky, though, as it risks a return to the sacred  
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55 texts and accusations of revisionism. However, there are interesting debates today  
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3 among Marxists (and non-Marxists) on how we should understand the current  
4 economic crisis. For instance, most Marxists do not think merely re-regulating  
5 capitalism will get at the structural problems with capitalism and its crisis driven  
6 dialectic. Nor do most Marxists see the problem as one of a financial crisis, but  
7 rather one of exploitation by capital as it holds down wages as productivity and  
8 profits rise dramatically (Wolff, 2009). Given the fact that so few young scholars are  
9 familiar with these debates, a brief overview of current debates would have been  
10 helpful, though, again, perhaps beyond the purview of the book.  
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22 On the other hand, many scholars critique neoliberalism, but do not think of  
23 themselves as Marxists (or post-structuralists) but appropriate some ideas that they  
24 find particularly useful in illuminating some aspect of their work. It isn't quite clear  
25 whether this is what Anyon is doing in her final chapter on extending Marxism. For  
26 instance, she appropriates David Harvey's (2007) notion of (capital) accumulation  
27 by dispossession as a way to help educators understand the current attack on the  
28 public sector, whether in New York City in the 1970s, or Wisconsin and Greece  
29 today. As Naomi Klein has documented in *The Shock Doctrine*, natural or  
30 manufactured crises are used to jump start the privatization of nearly everything. As  
31 legitimate markets dry up, capital becomes more predatory, eating away at the  
32 social infrastructure (bridges, pensions, public health care, public education,  
33 transportation) that sustains the common good and a decent standard of living that  
34 was the bedrock of the American Dream. This is in fact consistent with Marx's view  
35 of capital, which is always seeking to extract the surplus value of labor.  
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Given the extent to which the U.S. is moving to the political right, this is likely not the time to pit Marx against Paul Krugman, whom Anyon also draws on. Anyon is clearly not an orthodox Marxist and appears to appropriate good ideas where she finds them. What her book illustrates is that there are many good ideas in Marx and that they can guide a scholar as she seeks to understand the persistence of social, racial, gender, and sexual inequality. Though many Marxist scholars may find this book unsatisfying to the extent that it leaves a lot out, what it does do is de-mystify Marxism for young scholars who find Marx intimidating. In this sense, it is a good entry-point for scholars of all ages who want to get a foothold in Marxist theory and an insider's view of how social theory has affected a scholar's life work.

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