A Relational Realist Vision for Education Policy and Practice

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7. A Summary of the Argument Presented

In this final chapter, I will summarise the argument presented in this book. Below is an outline of the argument, followed by further exposition of each point:

1. In hegemonic approaches to policy, the functionalist conceptual infrastructure is incapable of acknowledging the human element in policy initiatives and practices. Instead of managing differentiation relationally, the system-based perspective defines the parameters of knowledge. Thus, the state intervenes to ensure interactive dynamics enable individuals to meet system needs.

2. Aware that such governance models are epistemically closed, an alternative general framework is needed to guide the logic of social policies and interventions.

3. Based on a relational realism, the *morphogenetic paradigm* explains the co-emergence of the human and social. If policies reference the *latent ontological reality* of the human-in-the-social, it is first necessary to explain personal morphogenesis.

4. To enter the dynamics of social relations is to emphasise the role of social reflexivity in the process of social capitalisation. The concept of social capital is understood in a disentangled way to include the temporal stages and elements of morphogenetic processes.

5. A relational realist application of Parsons's AGIL scheme is proposed. The scheme provides a compass to articulate contextually sensitive practices whose properties are reflexivity transformed in response to the latent dimension of social relations (the human person).

6. A contextually sensitive model of teaching and learning is expressed in the interplay between direction and liberation. The organisational

and structural aspect of AGIL is devised as a networked ecology that is reflexively responsive to relations of proximity.

System-Based *Lib/Lab* Triangulation

Based on modernity's *symbolic code*, the conceptual make-up of UK *lib/lab* governance models negate the human element. The referential dimension of these different models is expressed in initiatives that aim to regulate the exchange parameters between *Ego and Alter* (to reproduce an economically productive social order). Alter's role is articulated between the individual and collective (*homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus*) in which the self-maximising individual operates in state-regulated environments that provide opportunities (public goods). As public goods are attached to status-roles, participants are not sovereign in making them. Opportunities, according to the logic of fairness, are provided to enable *homo economicus* to operate within a situational logic of competition within a self-professed meritocratic regime.

From New Labour to Conservative approaches, different models espouse the discourse of devolution and the need to transcend inadequate rigid ideological templates. However, in practice, we have an existing state-defined mission that appropriates the processes of sociability and the parameters of knowable reality. When devolution is proposed, the acts of reference — values, rules, and contextual resources — are conceptualised from a state-based perspective. What is possible, in an epistemic sense, is inherently limited in its possibilities.

A Model of Governance based on the Relational Realist Approach

Due to the limitations of modernity's *symbolic code* and its accompanying functionalist *symbolic reference*, an alternative is needed to explain the emergence of the human-in-the-social. A *philosophical ontology*, relational realism is based on a meta-theoretical approach that starts from the epistemic dynamics between the act of reference and referent. The referential detachment between *Ego and Alter*, mediated in its socio-cultural context, is the basis of transcendental realism. Because knowledge is derived from the conditions of its emergence, the relational

approach advocated is a transcendental realism that does not dictate epistemic parameters in a pre-defined way. Instead, relational realism views the possibilities of knowledge within relations of proximity and the wider place of their emergence (the site of their emergence includes the broader contingencies of a networked social reality).

As the constitution of Alter is irreducible to the contingencies of relations, epistemic relativity leads to *judgemental rationality*. Thus, to explain the emergence of Alter, equally relational referential acts are needed that include existing socio-cultural mediations. When the relationship is the first ontological premise, the conditions of emergence become central to an understanding of the object of reference. The *morphogenetic paradigm* is a paradigm that explains the emergence of Alter from within the interplay of agent-subjects and socio-cultural structures.

Judgemental rationality is enacted by adopting the *morphogenetic paradigm* and utilising methodological research tools and research-based policies and practices guided by this paradigm. The research outcomes of *judgemental rationality* produce theories that reflect a relational understanding of social reality. Thus, the objective of a relational realist approach is to develop a conceptual paradigm and tools that explain the distinction between the human and the social. From this distinction, an alternative policy blueprint can be established that acknowledges the emergence of the human-in-the-social as the referential axis of governance.

The basis of this alternative blueprint is the epistemic quadrangle. It specifies a scheme for analysing interchanges within relations. In this quadrangle, the first triangle refers to the observer and the second one to the *latent ontological reality* of the perceived object. The relation between the upper and lower triangle is mediated by existing referential acts (socio-cultural mediations) the parameters of which reference the *latent reality* of the object in the lower triangle (the development of potential powers). As the referent in the lower triangle emerges from these mediations between the upper and lower triangles, there is a crucial role played by the *judgemental rationality* of agent-subjects — as *Relational Subjects* — in normalising the ontology of the lower triangle. The normalisation of the referent through the transformation of existing mediations is a morphogenetic process that includes relations

of proximity to broader stabilising mechanisms in the form of socio-cultural structures.

The Morphogenetic Paradigm and Personhood

Socio-cultural mediations between the upper and lower triangle give rise to the person. The *morphogenetic paradigm* accounts for the emergence of personal identity from these mediations. If social interventions answer the normative question in a transcendental way, then an account needs to be provided of the past, present, and future trajectories of personal and socio-cultural morphogenesis. The normative question is approached through the *meta-reflexive* activity of *Relational Subjects* who acknowledge the trajectory of personal morphogenesis (personal morphogenesis being the ground of relating to Alter). In the case of education, for example, student development is based on assessment activities that are responsive to changing starting points in morphogenetic learning cycles.

The *morphogenetic paradigm* investigates how personal identity develops in a world-directed interplay between personal deliberations and the context of these deliberations. The relationality between the human and the social implicates an explanation of how the indexical 'I' is individually sensed as a socially indexed device, that is, how the indexical 'I' reaches an alignment between itself and a pre-existing third-person social identity. In this alignment process, the role requirements of the social identity generate concerns that are reflexively navigated. The subjective authority regarding third-person reality is presupposed by a capability to deliberate on this reality. This deliberation leads to the individual dedicating himself to a role and its behavioural outcomes.

As deliberation encompasses the full spectrum of reality, subjective engagement is pre-dependent on the practical order from which reflexive human properties and powers emerge. These properties and powers sustain the sense of self and the propositional elaborations in reference to the discursive world. As a result, the distinction between molecules and meanings is necessary logically and in an explanatory sense when explaining the transformation of society's normativity within the morphogenetic interplay between personal reflexivity and Agency.

The internal conversation is viewed as the anchor of personal and socio-cultural morphogenesis. As a result, reflexivity is restricted to personal deliberations as the efficient cause of change. The aim of rethinking the morphogenetic equation is to expand reflexivity beyond the personal while maintaining a stratified conception of personhood. Seeking to ascribe primacy to the interactive dynamics within relations that anchors personal and socio-cultural morphogenesis, the revision of the morphogenetic equation is twofold:

1. The psycho-developmental perspective on personhood distinguishes the different ways the reflexive capacity can be enacted.

2. Reflexivity is extended to social relations and is not exclusive to individuals.

Regarding the first revision, the idea of differentiated developmental selves accounts for the emergence of the reflexive capacity. The developmental focus leads to a view of reflexivity as semantically possible. At the same time, due to the self-presence of experiences, the reflexive capacity is enacted as part of an irreducible developmental trajectory. This irreducibility is affected by pre-existing pre-semantic mechanisms that impact the direction of reflexivity.

Reflexivity, therefore, is a meaning-making mechanism that is not necessarily tied to individuals to safeguard against the sociological imperialism of the conceptual self. Instead, it extends to any activity that shapes morphogenetic outcomes. The management of personal morphogenesis is the task of individuals who exist within a system's interactive dynamics that includes personal, collective, and social reflexivity. The outcomes of these dynamics are seen in the emergent properties that make up the system. Triple morphogenesis, then, is the product of the interactive dynamics between the reflexivity of individuals, collective *Relational Subjects*, and social networks.

Social Capitalisation and the Making of Relational Goods

An immanent critique of social capital theories demonstrates that, due to their individualistic or holistic starting points, analytical closure

leads to a conceptual incapability to account for the internal dynamics of social capital's production. The alternative proposed here is that social capitalisation is part of the morphogenetic processes of sociability, the ties of which are expressed within interactions. These interactions, because of their proximity, are sources of social capital; they generate *ASV* that augments the processes of sociability through the generation of primary *relational goods*.

Relational goods, as the effects of sociability, are both dependent and independent variables. In a stratified understanding of social reality, whether *relational goods* explain or are the object of explanation is determined by the temporal stage of a *morphogenetic cycle* under analysis. Social capital as a *relational good* is produced in processes of capitalisation (the generation of *ASV*) that exist within reciprocal interchanges. It enables the development of Alter within the fabric of sociability that is renewed through the continued production of *relational goods*.

The proposal of a morphogenetic *civil society* is based on the dialogue between the processes of sociability and their outcomes that reference the human-in-the-social. Within this dialogue, *civil society* emerges from the reflexive interdependence between different dimensions of sociability that produce *relational goods*. To reiterate, in starting from the relation, the *morphogenetic paradigm* can explain the origins of existing conditions of production and their consequences. The relational ethicality of *civil society* implicates the *meta-reflexive* management of these conditions in the form of synergy between *primary, secondary, and generalised sociability* (the synergy being the mode of production of *relational goods*). Together, these forms of sociability articulate social capitalisation in making *relational goods*. Social capital as a *relational good* is both an outcome and a contributing factor in the morphogenetic process.

A Relational Realist Utilisation of the AGIL Scheme

The AGIL scheme is a compass to understand the relationship between integrative and referential social realities, that is, the recursive relationship between sociability and *relational goods*. When reconsidered through the relational *symbolic code*, it is used to guide a relational ethicality in which *relational goods* are emergent from reciprocal relationships. The integrative reality of AGIL is the socio-cultural structure that relationally

guides morphogenetic processes of sociability. In turn, the *relational goods* produced from the interplay between the formal and active inform the future direction of the referential and integrative realities of AGIL.

In the case of education, the formal organisation of networks is the structural aspect of sociability that guides and nurtures the application of the curriculum and assessment within learning environments. What transpires in the classroom utilises relational concepts and practices discovered in dialogue within the interactive dynamics of teaching and learning (the 'black box' of sociability). Reference to these changing concepts and practices is the shifting subjective access points of the learner, that is, the ability to scaffold the learner to the next stage of a learning cycle.

While the learner's changing access points represent the referential reality of education's AGIL, the importance of pre-existing criteria-based goals is necessary as a directive constraint. The dialogical posture of learning, considering the relational nature of cognitive processes, means that the constraint of criteria simultaneously enables personal development. Thus, the student's developmental reality (L) is not externally negated in the organisation of teaching and learning (I). The organisational dimension of AGIL adapts in reference to the way the student develops — a *meta-reflexive* process that is first articulated dialogically by the teacher within the interactive morphogenetic dynamics.

Situated Pedagogy and the Interplay between Direction and Liberation

In a 'directive liberating' approach to education, curriculum design is considered to emerge from the 'black box' of sociability. The curriculum takes different dimensions depending on its role — whether as a primary or secondary relation good. In terms of classroom practice, the lived curriculum is experienced in the context of the student's personal development. The planned curriculum is a secondary *relational good* whose features change based on the dynamics of relations of proximity.

Whether at the level of *generalised sociability* or *primary sociability*, the curriculum is tied to the development of Alter. Assessment evaluates the efficacy of the delivered (planned) curriculum in its capacity to direct

the learner. In this context, evaluation enables learning development by scaffolding the learner. Teaching and learning concepts and practices are renewed within school-based environments according to judgements about what works in a student's development. As a result, school-based research merges assessment practices with the development of the learner through *judgemental rationality*. This is a *meta-reflexive* judgement on what works when considering the maximisation of development.

The relational realist approach, in merging assessment with subjective input, contrasts with prevailing methods that start from desired outcomes. Disconnecting outcomes from the individual's starting point in this way leads to evaluations of the delivered curriculum through norm-referenced assessment. In such a scheme, the goal is not to develop the student through the criteria; instead, it uses criteria to assess if students are meeting the selection process of pre-set roles. Accordingly, when starting from the learner's perspective, it is necessary to distinguish between *how* to assess and *what* to assess. The *how* dimension refers to the organisational facet of the AGIL compass, whose design and application are based on Alter's given morphogenetic starting point (L). Therefore, the conceptual outcome sought — *what* to assess — refers to the value pattern of the AGIL scheme due to its reference being a subjective developmental point.

Assessment within teaching and learning relations enables the development of Alter's potentiality. In developing this potentiality, assessment integrates the learner into a subject's criteria self-referentially. The ipsative-referenced dimension of assessment ensures that criteria guide the learner (assessment *for* learning) rather than judge him or her (assessment *of* learning). There is an 'in-gear' conception of freedom in this after-modern context: interaction with a pre-existing world enables the learner's agency, as enacted through the interdependence between control and freedom. The authority of criteria is expressed in a problem-posing dialogical relationship in which learning is co-directed with the teacher. When standards are self-referenced, they are aligned with a subjective access point within teaching and learning situations. Such situated pedagogy means that the status-roles of *Ego and Alter* are constantly changing in response to the dynamics of learning and knowing. Authority — in this situated sense — guides the student to competencies that underpin critical investigation and prolonged study.

Primacy ascribed to the lived and experienced curriculum ensures that development occurs coherently. The curriculum, therefore, is not merely something that establishes what to learn; instead, it sets a blueprint that guides the development of skills necessary to enable self-reliant learning. In the lived and experienced curriculum, the ipsative consideration is expressed in the student's awareness of how to monitor and evaluate self-growth. While one-off norm-referenced assessment produces learner dependency, assessment literacy develops self-reliant learners who continuously observe and evaluate their growth. As assessment practices are intertwined into the lived and experienced curriculum, the delivered (planned) curriculum guides learner agency by harmonising subjective access points (the personal morphogenesis of the learner) to its goals.

Final Comments

The argument presented in this book finds its culmination in how teaching and learning are planned and delivered within the epistemic dialogue between *Ego and Alter*. This dialogical approach opposes the epistemic closure of pre-set learning outcomes and the universal application of grade bands in system-based governance. When the overarching objective is to integrate individuals into collectives, then teaching and learning are tied to standards that define reciprocated expectations between actors. The negation of subjective learning cycles directly follows from making the pre-defined referential axis of the welfare state the starting point of education. Within such meritocratic regimes, discourses of fairness act as an aspect of collective interventions to ensure talent is developed through the provision of system-defined relevant work-based skills.

In opposition to modern *lib/lab* governance, the morphogenetic articulation of relations continuously generates *relational goods* in *civil society*. Whether through the activity of the individual or collective *Relational Subjects*, the generation of *relational goods* leads to the solidarity necessary for creating social capital. *Relational Subjects* become drivers of civil welfare whose activity exists in a broader network-like structure emergent from morphogenetic processes (Donati & Archer 2015).

These morphogenetic processes *meta-reflexively* extend the parameters of sociability based on the emergent goals pursued.

In an after-modern context, solidarity is produced within relations of proximity and is continuously enhanced by primary *relational goods*. The generation of primary *relational goods* is guided by formalised organisational settings whose integrative practices and policies reflect the relations it seeks to regulate, that is, its *symbolic reference*. This way, secondary *relational goods* — the formal organisational settings of networks — are the structural aspect of AGIL that manage differentiation at the intersubjective level. It is the management of differentiation in a relational way (the mode of production) that ensures the patterns of sociability produce *ASV* in exchanges between *Ego and Alter*. In opposition to modernity's functional model of integration, the outcomes produced are a function of the relations between subjects oriented to each other as *Relational Subjects*.

In an educational context, policies and practices may be instituted to enable talent development by creating *relational goods*. To achieve this goal, the curriculum must be both a primary and secondary *relational good* in terms of its temporal place within morphogenetic processes. These processes renew the fabric of sociability and the different dimensions that define it as a relational order. Solidarity is expressed in the engagement of learners in reciprocal (dialogical) relationships with teaching and learning. In such a scheme, education is directed by integrating the learner into an existing body of knowledge through self-referenced developmental milestones. The broader institutional network provides the infrastructural setting that produces the necessary social capital for individuals to pursue personal growth and development. Documentation of learning and the iterative planning of pathways to further learning is part of an educational relational order that ties the curriculum to the ipsative evaluation of talent development.

Talent development should be understood in its broader sense. It is self-referential (ipsative) to ensure developmental coherence and relevance to Alter, but it is also part of a wider *civil society*. *Affective outcomes* include attitudinal changes that develop with the demands of 'rigorous rigour' (Freire in dialogue with Shor 1987b) in learning to participate and to reach a critical judgement. Talent development is identity formation that is relationally constituted, that is, the identity of

Relational Subjects that belongs to others through a logic of non-negation. As part of personal morphogenesis, identity formation is realised via developmental access points. These access points are opportunities for a 'liberatory invitation' that utilises dialogue within teaching and learning relationships to guide students in applying their reflexivity in reference to their relations (Freire in dialogue with Shor 1987b). The 'rigorous rigour' of *relational reflexivity* is part of *affective outcomes* that nurtures a relationality based on a mode of knowing directed at the emergent mediations between *Ego and Alter*.

There is a difference between a dialogue based on individual experiences and one that is part of the process of learning and knowing (Freire in dialogue with Macedo 1995). In the latter, learning and knowing include experiences as part of relations to the world (natural, practical, and discursive) that dialectically facilitate subjectivity's critical relationship to objectivity. The aim is to transcend these experiences through an attitude of epistemological curiosity that referentially detaches from the inhabited world (Freire in dialogue with Shor 1987b). To abstract from the given entails a situated and dialogical pedagogy authentic to Alter's point of development. The authority of constraint mentors Alter into knowing how to know in new ways in the spirit of solidarity. It is only through consideration of the wider socio-cultural context — the organisational dimension of AGIL — that creates the conditions that make a shared and emergent 'We-ness' possible.