

# Gramsci and Educational Thought

*Edited by*

**Peter Mayo**

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## Gramsci and Educational Thought

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# Notes on Contributors

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**Deb J. Hill** is a Political Philosopher of Education at the University of Canterbury at Christchurch. She is the author of *Hegemony and Education: Gramsci, post-marxism and radical democracy revisited* (Lexington Books, US, 2007). Her interests lie in critical theory and the dialectical thought that underpins it.

**John Holst** is currently an associate professor in the Department of Leadership, Policy and Administration at the University of St Thomas in Minnesota, USA. He is the author of the book *Social Movements, Civil Society, and Radical Adult Education* (Bergin & Garvey, 2002) and articles that have appeared in several journals including the *Adult Education Quarterly*, the *International Journal of Lifelong Education* and the *Harvard Educational Review*.

**Thomas Clayton** is Professor and Chair of the English Department at the University of Kentucky, USA. He is a language policy scholar, and he has written widely on educational language policy and English language spread, particularly in Cambodia. He is also interested in Gramsci and the process of hegemony relative to language and education.

**Peter Ives** is an Associate Professor of Politics at the University of Winnipeg, Canada. He is the author of *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (University of Toronto Press, 2004; Winner of the Klibansky Prize 2004–5) and *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (Macmillan/ Pluto Press, 2004). His current research investigates the relationships between language and democracy.

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**Uwe Hirschfeld** was born in 1956 in Kassel, Germany, and studied social work, education and political Science (Dr. rer. pol.). Since 1992, he has been Professor of Social Work at the Protestant University of Applied Science, Dresden.

**Rosemary Dore Soares** has a PhD in History and Philosophy of Education, and is an Associate Professor in Philosophy of Education in the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil. She has published *Gramsci, o Estado e a escola* [Gramsci, the State and the School] (Unijuí Ed., 2000) and is coordinator of research on philosophical and pedagogical references of the organization of the school in Brazil and in Italy, and the project 'Observatory of Vocational Education and Drop Out in Brazil'.

# Foreword

As the editor of this book Peter Mayo has provided an appropriate context in which to view the excellent contributions to this monograph in the year of Gramsci's anniversary. I remember inviting Peter to edit the original special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* when I visited Malta for the International Network of Philosophers of Education Conference in 2006 (<http://www.ucm.es/info/inpe/>). As Editor I was pleased to be able to offer Peter the opportunity to display the best of Gramsci's scholarship in the field of education and also to meet with him and his colleagues at the University of Malta, including Kenneth Wain, Carmel Borg and others.

Peter Mayo rightly emphasizes that Gramsci's prison writings constitute an educational project based on the valuable concept of hegemony that Gramsci develops as an essential part of the sociology of capitalist society enabling an understanding of the manufacture of consent by the powerful through the institution of cultural values. I have nothing to add to what the contributors have made clear in their individual chapters and applaud the new scholarship on Gramsci's educational project—its origins, its enactment in the context of the party, its applications to 'global English' and women's 'ways of knowing, its contribution to the envisioning of the project of socialist education in Brazil.

Gramsci's analysis of Fordism and education in the age of Fordism has a new relevance with the global recession, the neoliberal meltdown and end of the ideology of automobilism. In 1934 in insightful notes in the *Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci defined 'Americanism' as 'mechanicist', crude, brutal—'pure action' in other words—and contrasted it with tradition. He attempted to demonstrate how Fordism was destructive of trade unions leading to a crisis in high wages, hegemonic at the point of production and the production of new Taylorized workers. Fordist production entailing an intensified industrial division of labor, assembly line flow of work with increasingly specified tasks by management, increased the potential for capitalist control over the pace and intensity of work and led to the displacement of craft-based production in which skilled laborers exercised substantial control over their conditions of work.

Now arguably, the time has come again to analyze, understand and enact a new politics that has come to characterize late capitalism and the new subjectivities demanded by post-fordist regimes that are conducive to an emerging globally integrated capitalism and which increasingly rest on aspects traditionally considered central to education—knowledge, learning, research, collaboration, and collegial peer review. Gramsci brilliantly details the social and educational subjects that were so essential in the first phase of Fordism and today Gramsci's challenge to educational thinkers is to analyze and determine the contours of the educational subject

of knowledge capitalism, the nature of political struggles centering around symbolic manipulation and appropriation, copyright and the production of intellectual goods, the rise of the new global information utilities, and the new international class formations of what contemporary Italian theorists call ‘cognitive capitalism’ (Lazzarato, 1996, 2001; Caffentzis & Silvia Federici, 2007; Terranova, 2000) defined by what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt call ‘immaterial labour’. Based on Marx’s notion of ‘general intellect’ Lazzaroti (1997) suggests:

All the characteristics of the post-industrial economy (present both in industry and at a territorial level) are heightened within the form of ‘immaterial’ production properly defined: audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities etc. The activities of this kind of immaterial labour oblige us to question the classic definitions of ‘work’ and of ‘workforce’, because they are the result of a synthesis of varying types of savoirfaire (those of intellectual activities, as regards the cultural-informational content, those of manual activities for the ability to put together creativity, imagination and technical and manual labour; and that of entrepreneurial activities for that capacity of management of their social relations and of structuration of the social cooperation of which they are a part). This immaterial labour constitutes itself in forms that are immediately collective, and, so to speak, exists only in the form of network and flow.

Hardt and Negri (2000) identify three kinds of ‘immaterial’ labour: ‘Informatized’ industrial labor that has become a service to the market; analytical and symbolic labor—knowledge work both creative and routine; production and manipulation of affective labor that involves human contact, and includes bodily labor. On this basis education itself can be seen as an example of immaterial labour, leading to other forms of symbolic work—both creative and routine.

I would like to record my thanks to Peter Mayo and his contributors for such a penetrating and scholarly collection.

MICHAEL A. PETERS

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# Introduction: Antonio Gramsci and Educational Thought

Peter Mayo

I write this Introduction at a time when several organizations throughout the world are winding up or have just wound up their series of activities commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the demise of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci has been granted iconic status in many countries, where every tenth anniversary of his death does not pass unnoticed, given the several activities and seminars held in his honour. Gramsci enjoys one of the widest influences in social theory, except perhaps in his own country where he represents a classic case of *nemo profeta in patria*. Of course one comes across the usual activities carried out by the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, including a two-day conference in Rome in April 2007, which drew scholars from different parts of the world. The local council (Comune) in his home town of Ghilarza understandably also carried out a series of activities to mark the anniversary year. This notwithstanding, one gathers the impression that Gramsci is much more revered outside Italy—in Germany, France, Canada, the USA, the United Kingdom, Finland, South Africa, India and Latin America, for example—than within his homeland. His image in Italy seems to have suffered following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the transmutations that occurred within the former Italian Communist Party Gramsci helped found in 1921.

This book, however, seeks to pay tribute to this great political figure and social thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It comprises chapters from different parts of the world including New Zealand, Brazil, the United States, Canada, Germany and England. It complements another publication which I co-edited (Borg *et al.*, 2002) in that it draws on the work of authors with which we three editors of the 2002 book were not familiar at the time of planning that volume. I was very careful therefore not to include in this book authors who had contributed to the 2002 book. The issues tackled are various. Deb Hill provides an in-depth philosophical discussion on the Hegelian and Marxian influence on Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' arguably the central phrase in his prison writings originally intended as a work '*für ewig*' (for eternity). The connections between Gramsci's thought and Marx's theory of consciousness and dialectical mode of thinking are carefully teased out here. This piece complements the work of Paula Allman (2002) around the subject.

Gramsci's entire project in the prison writings, centring on the notion of hegemony, of which he does not provide a systematic exposition, is an educational project—education in the broadest sense possible. Education is central to the workings of hegemony in which every relationship is a pedagogical relationship. In other words,

to do justice to Gramsci's writings that are of relevance to education, one should tackle Gramsci's work holistically (Borg *et al.*, 2002) and not confine oneself to the tract on schooling, or more precisely 'the Unitarian school', found in Notebook 4 and revised in Notebook 12. Gramsci's pre-prison writings are also of great relevance here, together with some of his letters, since Gramsci accorded different forms of education, including adult education, great importance, considering their organization to be a key task of the Modern Prince that is the revolutionary party. This constitutes the subject of a well-informed chapter by John Holst, an attempt to see the several 'altre vie', which Gramsci explored for education, within the context of party work. As Holst underlines (see also Holst, 2001), it is fashionable these days to dilute or camouflage this aspect of Gramsci's thinking to render his ideas suitable for contemporary and possibly liberal appropriation.

And yet despite the wide range of educational activities which Gramsci explored both outside and inside prisons (recall his contributions to the development of the Scuola dei Confinati—prison school—at Ustica when awaiting trial, the Club di Vita Morale, the Institute of Proletarian Culture inspired by the Proletkult and the correspondence party school) quite an interesting debate arose, in the educational literature of the late 1970s and 1980s, around his notes on the Unitarian School. This was mainly because of the publication of Harold Entwistle's (1979) well-researched book (covering most aspects of education tackled by Gramsci) with its provocative title *Antonio Gramsci. Conservative schooling for radical politics*. This book sparked off quite a debate around Gramsci's conception of schooling in reaction to the *Riforma Gentile*. For this reason we are including, in this volume, a highly informative piece by Thomas Clayton, concerning Gramsci and the actual pedagogical ideas of Giovanni Gentile, the leading Italian idealist philosopher who, together with Benedetto Croce, is widely regarded in Italy as having kept Italian philosophy rooted in idealism (some argue derogatorily that he rendered Italian philosophy quite 'provincial' in this respect) through which it therefore developed a strong anti-positivist stance. Gentile, of course, became Italy's Minister of Education (Pubblica Istruzione) during the Fascist period and, as the title 'Riforma Gentile' (the Gentile Reform) indicates, was responsible for the scholastic reform that Gramsci criticised. Clayton (2006), the editor of a very revealing volume on some international reinventions of Gramsci's ideas, seeks to 'do justice' to Gentile in this well researched piece.

It would be amiss to discuss Gramsci's political and educational ideas without giving due consideration to one of the major preoccupations in his thinking, and the area of his specialization (*indirizzo*) at the University of Turin: language. Gramsci's writings on language have been the concern of several leading Italian scholars including Tulio de Mauro (the great linguist who served as Minister of Education in Italy in the Amato Government). Peter Ives is arguably one of the leading contemporary writers on Gramsci's notion of Language and Hegemony as testified by his two books on the subject (Ives, 2004a,b). I am pleased therefore to be able to include a contribution from him with respect to the Hegemony of Global English. For the concept of hegemony, as Ives has been at pains to indicate, featured prominently in the linguistics debate to which the young Gramsci was

exposed at the University of Turin as a student of the acclaimed Matteo Bartoli who once hailed the young Sardinian as the archangel destined to defeat the grammarians.

Gramsci's influence is however felt in a variety of areas, including feminism (see Holub, 1992) and community development (see Ledwith, 2005). Margaret Ledwith provides us with a Gramscian analysis of community development from a feminist perspective drawing on her own work as a practitioner in the field. Furthermore we notice the various discussions in the educational literature on the relevance of Gramsci's thought for different aspects of education in specific continents or countries. Uwe Hirschfeld from Dresden is, together with Ursula Apitzsch, Armin Bernhard and Andreas Merckens, among the most prominent German scholars writing on Gramsci and education, working collaboratively with one of the major German publishing houses that promote Gramsci's work: Argument Verlag. Hirschfeld provides us with an interesting discussion, translated from the original piece in German, concerning Gramsci's relevance for social pedagogy, an important area of educational, social and cultural work throughout Germany. Furthermore, as indicated earlier on and in other volumes, Gramsci has a major following in Latin America especially, as indicated by Morrow and Torres (1995), in the field of popular education. He is also influential in the debates about schooling and Carlos Nelson Coutinho (1995), one of the leading Brazilian Gramscian scholars, states that he has been very influential in the work of Brazil's ruling Partido dos Trabalhadores (at least in its early years). Rosemary Dore Soares (2000), who authored a book on the subject of Gramsci, the State and Brazilian education, provides us with a very revealing and insightful piece on the subject.

The range of subjects tackled and the international representation found in this book make for a very variegated and rich compendium of writings on Gramsci's relevance to educational thought. It should make a strong contribution to the ever growing international literature on Gramsci and education.

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# A Brief Commentary on the Hegelian-Marxist Origins of Gramsci's 'Philosophy of Praxis'

DEB J. HILL

## Introduction

The true fundamental function and significance of the dialectic can only be grasped if the philosophy of praxis is conceived as an integral and original philosophy which opens up a new phase of history and a new phase in the development of world thought ... If the philosophy of praxis is not considered except in subordination to another philosophy, then it is not possible to grasp the new dialectic, through which the transcending of old philosophies is transcended and expressed. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 435)

There has been a great deal of speculation about the 'integral and original philosophy' which Gramsci here names the 'philosophy of praxis'. As Haug has suggested (2000, p. 11), several functions are potentially united in Gramsci's use of the phrase. Not only does it serve a pragmatic purpose as a linguistic camouflage to appease the prison censor: more importantly, it functions in a metaphorical fashion as a 'substantive programmatic concept' to inaugurate Marx's own distinctive form of thought. With regard to this latter role, Haug claims that what it ushers in is a 'coherent but non-systematic thinking' which not only 'grasps the world through human activity' (p. 11) but also 'addresses the whole' from below 'with a patient attention to particularity' (p. 12).

I fully concur with Haug's prognosis, and in this chapter want to explore the specific nuances of what Gramsci above names 'the new dialectic'.<sup>1</sup> The dialectic, as will be outlined, was Marx's specific 'mode of thought' or 'method of logic' as it has been variously called, by which he analyzed the world and man's relationship to that world. As well as constituting a theory of knowledge (epistemology), what arises out of the dialectic is also an ontology or portrait of humankind that is based on the complete historicization of humanity; its 'absolute "historicism"' or 'the absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought', as Gramsci worded it (Gramsci, 1971, p. 465). Embracing a fully secular and historical view of humanity, it provides a vantage point that allows the multiple and complex effects of our own conceptual heritage to be interrogated in relation to our developing 'nature' or 'being'.

As I demonstrate in this contribution, reading Gramsci's pre-prison and prison notebook legacy entails understanding the specific nuances of this Hegelian-Marxist