

# Critical Studies of Education

Volume 5

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We live in an era where forms of education designed to win the consent of students, teachers, and the public to the inevitability of a neo-liberal, market-driven process of globalization are being developed around the world. In these hegemonic modes of pedagogy questions about issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, colonialism, religion, and other social dynamics are simply not asked. Indeed, questions about the social spaces where pedagogy takes place—in schools, media, corporate think tanks, etc.—are not raised. When these concerns are connected with queries such as the following, we begin to move into a serious study of pedagogy: What knowledge is of the most worth? Whose knowledge should be taught? What role does power play in the educational process? How are new media re-shaping as well as perpetuating what happens in education? How is knowledge produced in a corporatized politics of knowledge? What socio-political role do schools play in the twenty-first century? What is an educated person? What is intelligence? How important are socio-cultural contextual factors in shaping what goes on in education? Can schools be more than a tool of the new American (and its Western allies') twenty-first century empire? How do we educate well-informed, creative teachers? What roles should schools play in a democratic society? What roles should media play in a democratic society? Is education in a democratic society different than in a totalitarian society? What is a democratic society? How is globalization affecting education? How does our view of mind shape the way we think of education? How does affect and emotion shape the educational process? What are the forces that shape educational purpose in different societies? These, of course, are just a few examples of the questions that need to be asked in relation to our exploration of educational purpose. This series of books can help establish a renewed interest in such questions and their centrality in the larger study of education and the preparation of teachers and other educational professionals.

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Nicola Pizzolato • John D. Holst  
Editors

# Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World

 Springer

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*John D. Holst  
To Malicha.  
Nico Pizzolato  
To Leyla. This is what I have been doing in  
between Harry Potter movies.*

# Foreword

Recent scholarship in the light of the opening of Soviet archives has confirmed that Gramsci was above all a political activist, before and after his imprisonment. This does not mean that we can reduce his work to an immediate reflection on the political moment or derive indications for political action today in any simple way. But his engagement with the great political, social, cultural and economic questions of his period informed his theoretical work and was written from the point of view of someone who had a goal—political intervention. Indeed, the complexity and richness of his categories derive from the need to understand cataclysmic events which simply could not be explained by preexisting schema. This was the only way to remain politically relevant. This is why he expands and transforms the very language of politics (Sassoon 2000). His intellectual work had an aim, but this aim did not determine his categories or its content. Machiavelli was his predecessor (Izzo 2009).

This is as relevant to his notes on education as to his ideas on politics and the state. As the contributions in this book demonstrate, it is impossible to focus on one theme or thread in his writing without arriving at a much wider discussion. The notes on the relationship between leaders and led, on the nature of political power, on ideological influence and on popular discourses, indeed, on contemporary political events, all relate to education. This could not be more obvious as I write this 5 months after the referendum in the UK on our membership of the European Union and a mere 3 weeks after Donald Trump's victory in the American elections. One of the more interesting, if painful, lessons of recent events in both the UK and the USA is that formal levels of education, particularly higher education, seem to have been indicators of the likelihood of voting in a certain way.

We are forced at regular intervals to consider how Gramsci might still be useful, in particular national territories, in an international context. How can we carry on with pessimism of the intelligence, but find some basis for optimism of the will? Gramscian (1975) categories concerning the role of intellectuals—educationalists in the broadest sense as specialist thinkers who in one form or another engage in

politics in such challenging circumstances—the changing nature of politics, and the undermining of the nation-state in a tumultuous international situation could not be more relevant. The rise of xenophobia, racism and populism of right and left, after a grave economic crisis, the threats to the foundations of the EU and to the traditional norms of liberal democratic politics in the USA, pose the greatest challenge since the 1930s. The cards have been thrown up into the air.

His attempt to rethink political organisation and practice to prevent the estrangement between, in his terms, professional intellectuals/leaders/activists and those intellectuals of everyday life, who do not have a professional function of an intellectual, but who possess *buon senso* within their common sense, could not be more relevant. But nor was he a populist. He did not romanticise popular culture. He was critical of common sense and vehement about the need to move beyond it at the very same time as engaging with it. He understood why *l'uomo qualunque*—the man or woman on the street—was so tenacious in holding onto what she or he ‘knows’. Confronted with polished or indeed emotional arguments from different sets of intellectuals—in Gramsci’s terms politicians, journalists, academics and priests arguing amongst themselves but addressing the population at large—it is understandable that people retreat to what makes sense to them. What should I believe? I will stick with what I know, with personal experience, however limited it might be.

The rejection of experts in the referendum campaign and in Trump’s campaign could not have been clearer or more familiar from a Gramscian perspective. The struggle between emotions and rational argument and what Ortega y Gasset termed the revolt of the masses framed both campaigns (Ortega y Gasset 1960/1930). But this by no means is to suggest that rationality belongs entirely to one side or the other.

The questions Gramsci’s work might suggest that are suitable for our situation will inevitably be about politics in the very wide sense. An equally vital concern of Gramsci’s, inseparable from the need to remain in touch with the wider population, was to stay in touch with what he called effective reality. Organic links with the people and engagement with effective reality were the preconditions for the development of effective politics, relevant political organisation as well as theory. This connects to what Marx (1974) was referring to when he wrote that men, and we would say men and women, make history but not in conditions of their choosing. We have no choice but to engage with reality as it *is*, if we want to effect change. Pessimism of the intelligence is a prerequisite for any effective political intervention. Political passion, the pursuit of ideals, must be harnessed to, paraphrasing again, a concrete analysis of the concrete situation. The need to understand what *is* in order to understand what *may be*. Machiavelli once again comes to mind—the *virtù* of political analysis and leadership in the context of whatever *fortuna* may bring.

This fluid, complicated reality was part of Gramsci’s time and is part of ours. As is Gramsci’s dictum that the only way to destroy the old is to build the new—construction as the prerequisite of destruction. Criticism is not enough. Anger and passion are not enough. The seeds of the new are contained within the old, which in any

case cannot be levelled to the ground—there is no *tabula rasa*. But to find these seeds of renewal requires both specialist, analytical tools and organisational and conceptual ways to link with the good sense of the mass of the population. Gramsci serves us still.

London, UK  
November 2016

Anne Showstack Sassoon

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# Preface

This book is a collection of essays on the educational thought and the pedagogical approach of Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. Preceded by a broad introduction that positions Gramsci in his context and in the literature, the essays critically revisit the many passages of the *Prison Notebooks* and pre-prison writings where Gramsci addresses the nexus between politics and pedagogy. Some essays apply those concepts to specific contexts. The book for the first time brings to the attention of an English-speaking audience voices from current Gramsci scholarship in Italy and Latin America.

Pizzolato and Holst open the volume by placing Gramsci's pedagogical approach in an historical and historiographical context. Notwithstanding the fact that terms *pedagogy* or *education* are rarely covered by synthetic accounts of Gramsci's work, the literature on Gramsci the pedagogue spans across several decades and has solicited debates in different countries. In the English-language context, the most notable of these is perhaps the debate over Gramsci's alleged conservative understanding of pedagogy, sparked in the 1970s by a book by Harold Entwistle (1979) and recently revived after the publication of a book by E. D. Hirsch (2010) and the responses to them. Italy is, unsurprisingly, the country where Gramsci's ideas on education have been debated the longest. Pizzolato and Holst's chapter introduces, for the first time to an English-speaking audience, the Italian scholarly discussion that had its heyday in the 1970s, but that continues to resonate within the current scholarship, though often unacknowledged. This chapter ends with an analysis of how Gramsci's pedagogical thought has influenced, sometimes indirectly, practitioners and thinkers of critical pedagogy and adult education.

Existing English-language educational scholarship on Gramsci has generally shied away from fully engaging with Gramsci's writings on schooling. After the generally harsh reception given to Entwistle's claim that Gramsci advocated for a conservative schooling, there has been a general dismissal of these parts of the *Notebooks* or at least a reluctance to fully engage with them. In part, this may have to do with the incomplete English translation of the *Notebooks*. Relatedly, with a few exceptions, English-language education scholars of Gramsci demonstrate very little familiarity, if any at all, of the long tradition of Italian scholarship which fully

engages Gramsci's writings on schooling. We believe that several contributions to this volume (Fusaro, Maltese and Pagano) of Italian scholars and of the French scholar Tosel, rarely, if at all, published in English, can help rectify the absence of these Italian and French debates on Gramsci's analysis of schooling and pedagogy in English-language scholarship.

The first part of the book 'Understanding Gramsci and Education' consists of chapters addressing some of the key concepts that have traversed the literature, such as the nexus between hegemony, philosophy of praxis and pedagogy; Gramsci's proposal of the 'unitarian school'; and the role of the intellectuals as pedagogues. Peter Mayo suggests Gramsci's body of work can be read as offering a coherent view of education and its relationship with hegemony. This relationship is central, he argues, to his philosophy of praxis. In this way, Gramsci's political project can be understood as an educational project—a contention that is core to the approach of this entire book. For Mayo, 'the quest for a process of "intellectual and moral reform"' warrants an educational effort on all fronts. Mayo's chapter is followed by those of two scholars, Riccardo Pagano and Diego Fusaro, whose work is published in English for the first time.

Pagano argues that in Gramsci's writings, culture, education and politics are inextricably intertwined. One cannot talk about one without discussing the others. His chapter sets out to explain how this interconnection operates in Gramsci's *Notebooks*. Gramsci's worldview had a political matrix as it addressed the theoretical and political principles that guide social and institutional relations. Pagano focuses also on the role of intellectuals and their pedagogical/political dimensions. Pagano concludes that, 'Gramsci's thought contains, in its pedagogical vision, the synthesis of the human political dimension, which includes history, historicity, tradition, values and practices, in short, everything that belongs to humankind and to the human aspiration to build societies and states based on equality and freedom'. Diego Fusaro builds on some of the concepts of these earlier chapters and firmly locates Gramsci's pedagogical thought within his philosophy of praxis. He uses Giuseppe Vacca's phrase of 'pedagogical obsession' to characterise the enduring interest of the Sardinian thinker towards education, broadly conceived. Fusaro points out to the frequent references to pedagogical themes in the Prison Letters. Concepts of self-consciousness, culture and transformative praxis were central to Gramsci in his writings on matters such as schools and education, and these writings, according to Fusaro, are particularly necessary in the current times of systematic destruction of everything Gramsci stood for in terms of public education at every level.

The second part of the book includes contributors who use a Gramscian framework for research. Much of the English-language educational scholarship on Gramsci, particularly the extended works, tends to be of a highly theoretical nature; there is not a lot of analysis of Gramsci's own pedagogical work, the pedagogical work of his revolutionary contemporaries or current examples of Gramscian pedagogy. In this volume, María Alicia Vetter's comparative work on the pedagogical philosophy of Gramsci's Chilean contemporary, Luis Emilio Recabarren, helps us understand the revolutionary milieu of internationalism while also highlighting the

Latin American context of the time. Rebecca Tarlau's case study of the pedagogical work of the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST) adds an additional and contemporary Latin American example. According to Tarlau, MST activists use educational initiatives in public schooling as a 'war of position' to gain moral and intellectual leadership necessary to implement social change. Through the analysis of the pedagogical underpinning of the MST's strategic approach, Tarlau provides us with a living case of Gramscian pedagogy in action.

Alessandro Carlucci addresses the debate on the teaching of English as a 'global language' and the language policy of the European Union drawing on Gramsci's views on diversity and unification, on passive revolution and on linguistic hegemony. The chapter uses Italy as a case study of how English is perceived as an entry point to material and nonmaterial resources. Access to English as a global language is, however, typically restricted by cultural barriers and social inequality. The chapter builds upon the literature on Gramsci's longstanding interest in language and linguistics, a topic that has strong interconnections with his notions on pedagogy and hegemony. In her chapter, Flora Hillert applies Gramscian notions, such as that of historical bloc, to discuss how teachers in Argentina have positioned themselves at the front of the remarkable transformation of that country. In particular, she focuses on the ambivalent class perception of this group, at once part of the middle classes and of the popular classes, or *pueblo*, in terms of their political choices. Teachers are also analysed as intellectuals who, in a Gramscian sense, might or might not be 'organic' to the popular classes. Combining scholarship on contemporary educational policy and teacher subjectivity in the case of Argentina, Hillert shows us how Gramsci can help us understand how teachers and students live the contestation of hegemony in their day-to-day practice that is often merely theorised in the existing educational scholarship on Gramsci.

The third and final part of the book focuses on particular concepts drawn from Gramsci's work and their pedagogical import. Andrè Tosel tackles the complex question of the relation between the collective and the individual in Gramsci's notions of hegemony and historical bloc. These two spheres are, for Gramsci, closely connected and inseparable. There is a 'displacement' (*glissement*) from the individual to the collective level, and vice versa. Gramsci also famously talked about the individual as an historical bloc, an idea that Tosel dissects accurately. As a result, the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the pupil parallels and integrates into what happens at the societal level. The driving force of political leadership is a pedagogical relationship. In sum, the question of pedagogy, as addressed by Gramsci, allows Marxism to establish a form of congruence between the conceptualisation of the individual and the conceptualisation of society. For Tosel, Gramsci 'gives a real place to the recognition of the formation of the personality as a form of transformation of the social'.

In his chapter, Pietro Maltese embarks on a philological investigation of the term *subaltern* as employed by Gramsci and measures the distance between the original intent of the thinker and the ways this term has been deployed in the field of Subaltern Studies. As the author specifies, this does not necessarily undermine that scholarship, but complicates the way we should understand this term. The chapter

also explores the pedagogical implications of the notion of subaltern. Gramsci traced new paths of emancipation for the subaltern, stressing their incapability of spontaneous liberation without a political and pedagogical intervention. In sum, Maltese puts forwards a reconceptualisation of Gramsci's educational thought as a 'pedagogy for the subaltern'.

Lack of attention in the existing literature to the importance Gramsci placed on the political independence of the working class as an essential element of revolutionary pedagogy is taken up by Holst and Brookfield in their contribution. Holst and Brookfield frame the pedagogical process of political independence in terms of Gramsci's analysis of catharsis.

Overall, the volume provides evidence for the argument that pedagogy should have a central place in the interpretation of Gramsci's political theory. Gramsci's view that 'every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relationship' makes it imperative to dismiss narrow and formal interpretations of his educational theories as applying only to schooling. This book argues that what is required rather is an inquiry into the Italian thinker's broad conceptualisation of pedagogy, which he thought of as a quintessential political activity, central to understanding and transforming society.

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# Abbreviations for English Translations of Gramsci's Writings<sup>1</sup>

## Pre-prison Writings

- SPW-1: Gramsci, A. (1977). *Selections from political writings, 1910–1920* (Q. Hoare, Ed. & J. Mathews, Trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- SPW-2: Gramsci, A. (1978). *Selections from political writings, 1921–1926* (Q. Hoare, Ed. & Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- PPW: Gramsci, A. (1994c). *Pre-prison writings* (R. Bellamy, Ed. & V. Cox, Trans.) New York: Cambridge University Press.
- SCW: Gramsci, A. (1985). *Selections from cultural writings* (D. Forgacs, G. Nowell Smith, Eds. & W. Boelhower, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- AGR: Gramsci, A. (2000). *The Antonio Gramsci reader* (D. Forgacs, Ed.). New York: New York University Press.
- HPC: Gramsci, A. (1975). *History, philosophy and culture in the young Gramsci* (P. Cavalcanti, P. Piccone, Eds. & Trans.). St. Louis: Telos Press.

## Prison Writings

- SPN: Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare, G. Nowell Smith, Eds. & Trans.). New York: International Publishers.
- FS: Gramsci, A. (1995). *Further selections from the prison notebooks* (D. Boothman, Ed. & Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout the text, authors use the standard form for citations of notes from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in which Q represents the *Quaderni* and § represents the note. In addition, citations from the *Prison Notebooks* or from Gramsci's pre-prison writings use the following abbreviations to aid readers in locating available English translations of Gramsci's writings.



- LFP1: Gramsci, A. (1994a). *Letters from prison* (Vol. 1, F. Rosengarten, Ed. & R. Rosenthal, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- LFP2: Gramsci, A. (1994b). *Letters from prison* (Vol. 2, F. Rosengarten, Ed. & R. Rosenthal, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- PN1: Gramsci, A. (1992). *Prison notebooks* (Vol. 1, J. A. Buttigieg, Ed. & J. A. Buttigieg, A. Callari, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- PN2: Gramsci, A. (1996). *Prison notebooks* (Vol. 2, J. A. Buttigieg, Ed. & Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- PN3: Gramsci, A. (2007). *Prison notebooks* (Vol. 3, J. A. Buttigieg, Ed. & Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.