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ANTONIO GRAMSCI: A PEDAGOGY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Nicola Pizzolato & John D. Holst (Eds). Springer, Cham, Switzerland, 2017, 227 pages.¹

This new text on Gramsci, from editors Nicola Pizzolato and John Holst, is an important intervention into international conversations on Gramsci's major contributions not only to social theory, but to educational theory specifically. This specific relevance to educational scholarship is one of their key arguments; as much as scholars have laboured to *apply* Gramsci's thought to the domains of schooling and learning, Gramsci himself offered a robust theorization of pedagogy and learning. This theorization, however, extends beyond a critique of schooling as a social institution and more broadly into the domain of the cultural relations of epistemology.

My frustration with Gramscian work in the social sciences has always been that we overly rely upon scholars of Gramsci rather than Gramsci himself. This is not a phenomenon confined to Gramsci, and it signals a real and challenging aspect of the erosion of space for study and reflection amongst academics and graduate students. For example, in education we tend to rely upon the interpretations of Gramsci put forward by Perry Anderson, Martin Carnoy, Stuart Hall, and, in adult education specifically, Peter Mayo. This edited collection from Pizzolato and Holst follows and departs from this tradition in important ways. Yes, you are again reading *about* Gramsci or Gramsci 'through the lens' of other scholars, but this is not a collection that will replace, or I think aims to replace, a detailed study of the original text. Rather, this collection is for serious students of not only Gramsci, but the debates of the communist left in the early 20th century and the broader concern of organizing revolutionary struggle. I would not recommend this as a text to aid a first time reader of Gramsci, although for those pursuing research within the Gramscian conceptual economy, it is an essential text. Part of its necessity can be found in its insistence that scholars who utilize Gramsci must engage with the original work and that there is much to be found in his writing that English-language scholars have not yet drawn upon. Thus the aim of this text, which is to increase accessibility and exchange across linguistic barriers, is timely.

A particular strength of the text is the very useful introduction from editors. They begin by identifying a gap between English-language scholars' utilization of Gramscian concepts in the study of education and Italian-language scholars' study of Gramsci's scholarship on education. Identification of this dynamic is crucial as the trend within Gramscian analysis of education has, over time, developed to include less and less Gramsci and more and more third (or fourth or fifth) author articulation of concepts. I agree with their argument, and a similar one made by Paula Allman concerning both Gramsci and Marx, that deeper engagement by educational scholars with original work and analysis by these

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seminal authors, and not only the application or extension of concepts, is warranted. This separation can lead, unfortunately, to the reification of concepts when they are divorced from the conceptual economy in which they are developed. For example, a good deal of both the introduction and the first section of the book take up the articulation of hegemony as a pedagogical relationship. This is, I believe, a more complex reading of the concept than I often see circulate in education discourse. The first section aims to contextualize this approach to reading Gramsci by revisiting popular concepts including hegemony, culture, praxis, consciousness, intellectualism, civil society, integral state, consent/coercion, and pedagogy. With chapters from noted Gramscian scholars Mayo, Pagano, and Fusaro, these authors assert, each with their own perspective, that Gramsci's work must be read as fundamentally pedagogical and must be based in an understanding of his own reading of the 'philosophy of praxis.' This point is echoed by the editors in their introduction and they take pains to point out that Gramsci's analysis can only be understood from the standpoint of his own praxis: that is, his attempt to theorize his role as activist, intellectual, and (political) party organizer as well as from the historical reality of the crushed revolutionary movement that led to his imprisonment.

The second section elaborates this praxis-based reading of Gramsci by utilizing these conceptual tools in the study of various pedagogical spaces. While there is a great deal of discussion of primary and secondary schools in the first section, the second section will likely be of more interest to adult educators and students of adult education as the sites of research include social movements, political parties, and trade unions. I would caution, however, that these chapters are *theorizations* of pedagogical practice and, in keeping with the Gramscian approach, do not seek to provide examples of practice that can be exported across time, space, or culture. They do, however, provide insight into thinking through the potentialities and limitations of practical conditions, which is a particular strength of Gramscian scholarship more broadly. Whereas the first section of the collection draws heavily from Italian scholars of Gramsci, the second section profiles particular struggles in Latin America. While each offers an interesting introduction to a variety of historic and contemporary political struggles in the region, I found it interesting to note the complexity of internal debates amongst Gramscian scholars, particularly in their relationship to Marx. These debates are carried forward in the third section, which revisits these key conceptual tools. For example, the concept of hegemony and of the struggle for control of key hegemonic aspects of society is examined in depth across multiple chapters. Authors seem to circle around similar points, but without producing repetition. Rather, their key concerns are the key concerns of Gramsci: How does consciousness of class systems emerge? What role do educators have in the emergence of these forms of consciousness? What is the difference between revolutionary struggle over hegemony and liberal reform? How can you see this difference from the standpoint of social movements and civil society?

Several of the chapters did leave me with lingering questions as to their readings of Gramsci. For example, there are moments that beg questions regarding the disconnection of culture from materiality. Some chapters seem to reinforce a conceptual separation, using base/superstructure metaphors that contradict the readings of other authors within the collection. It is a monumental task in reading Gramsci, as it is difficult to conceptualize hegemony as both material and cultural without an explicit historical materialist orientation towards culture that sees it as both an expression of and determination of the material. This approach, of course, is based in historical materialist dialectics, which Allman (2010) and

Thomas (2009) have both argued is Gramsci's meaning when he refers to the 'philosophy of praxis.' In my opinion, this emphasis on the notion of praxis, including the lived conscious reality, is a needed strength and important contribution of this text.

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1 This review was accepted for publication in 2018 but due to a technical error, publication was delayed until now.

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