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Abstract

This article explores the impact of Gramsci's writings (in particular pedagogy as a hegemonic relation) on Critical Studies in Education (CSE) in North America. CSE focuses among other things on education for social justice and ecological questions. It refuses the separation of culture from power relations, and attempts to reconstruct knowledge to serve social needs through its insertion in the interstices of social reproduction, schools included. Indeed the classroom is one site for a war of position. But the school – and the university – are not the only institutions of and for education, which takes place as a lifelong process during which subaltern groups can use their critical learning capacities within and outside dominant class-based forms of knowledge. This locates the intellectuals produced by the subaltern groups in a two-way relationship with teachers, considered in their position as organic and potentially transformative intellectuals: in short there is a pedagogical relation that characterizes every form of hegemony and which here can form part of an alternative hegemony to that of the dominant classes. And in establishing an alternative hegemony, taking Freire and Gramsci each in their own way as reference points, one has to move from popular experience to then go on to movements or parties and the wider social context.

Keywords

Critical Studies in Education (CSE), Paulo Freire, North American pedagogists, social class, ethnicity, hegemonic relations

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Peter Mayo

Introduction

Critical Studies in Education (CSE) refer to a broad domain in educational enquiry covering the interrelated areas of critical education and critical pedagogy.¹ Though having an international resonance, partly influenced by Paulo Freire from Brazil and spreading widely to places such as Italy and Turkey, CSE features prominently, as a body of thinking and practice, among the Left in North America.² It has been a gradually growing area of scholarship over which considerable influence has been exerted by Antonio Gramsci, recognized as one of the twentieth century's greatest left wing (Communist) political activists³ and leading social theorists, one aspect of which was his theorization of power and its contributory sources, including education.

On the educational front, the prime focus within CSE is on education for social justice as well as ecological sensitivity. CSE also centres on the education-power nexus insofar as it raises questions

¹ I am greatly indebted to Professor Renate Holub of the University of California, Berkeley, for her suggestions in the development of this paper and to the following academics for providing me, throughout the Covid-19 lockdown, which kept me away from my university office library, with electronic versions of important texts on which I draw here. These are: Martin Carnoy, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Raymond A. Morrow (who procured me several electronic versions of books I have in my office and others), Shirley Steinberg and Carlos A. Torres.

² Paulo Freire's two-year sojourn in Massachusetts, while in exile, where he had his *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Freire, 2013) manuscript translated and published for the first time in English (Freire, 1970, 1993, 2018), had much to do with this.

³ Despite his physical disability, he was made by the Fascist Regime to languish in prison, with a view, according to Enrico Berlinguer, one of his major successors as Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party, to being killed "scientifically". Berlinguer was, in effect the leader of the largest communist party in West Europe, famous for breaking away from the Soviet orbit and giving rise, together with Georges Marchais of the French Communist Party and Santiago Carrillo, their Spanish counterpart, to Euro-Communism, a western European form of communism operating in a western-style representative democracy. Like Gramsci, Berlinguer - a recognized luminary on the Italian Marxist left - was also from Sardinia. Berlinguer was from Sassari, like his cousins Antonio Segni and Francesco Cossiga who were both to serve as Presidents of the Italian Republic. Both of them belonged to the ruling post-war Christian Democratic Party, while Segni was also a member of its forerunner, the Partito Popolare of Don Luigi Sturzo. Like Gramsci, he was a much revered public intellectual of considerable standing.

on “the relationship between what we do in the classroom,” and on “our effort to build a better society free of relations of exploitation, domination, and exclusion...” (McLaren, 2015b: xxvi). We can substitute ‘classroom’ with ‘learning setting’ as CSE deals with an array of sites of pedagogical practice.

Antonio Gramsci and Critical Studies in Education

Antonio Gramsci, undoubtedly a major source of influence and inspiration in CSE, appears in the work of most of the important figures in the field. More often than not, they expound and engage his main ideas. He features in anthologies of critical pedagogy or critical education (Apple *et. al*, 2009; Darder, Mayo, Paraskeva, 2016) and in introductory books (Giroux, 2020; McLaren, 2016). Including Gramsci in such books has become *de rigueur*. Henry A. Giroux, a key figure in the critical pedagogy movement, gives Gramsci great prominence by stating: “Refusing to separate culture from systemic relations of power, or politics from the production of knowledge and identities, Gramsci redefined how politics bore down on everyday life through the force of its pedagogical practices, relations, and discourses.” (Giroux, 2020: 53). Similarly, Joe Kincheloe, another key figure in critical pedagogy, noted that in “the context of oppressive power and its ability to produce inequalities and human suffering, Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony is central to critical research” (Kincheloe, 2008, 54).⁴ Michael W. Apple *et al* (2009), also give prominence to Antonio Gramsci at the very outset of their handbook on critical education, stating that “... Gramsci (1971a) argued that one of the tasks of a truly counter-hegemonic [*a term Gramsci never used –P.M.*] education was not to throw out ‘elite knowledge’ but to reconstruct its form and content so that it serves genuinely progressive social needs”. Apple *et. al* remind us that Gramsci warned against “intellectual suicide” (p. 4), one of the things to bear in mind in critical educational research and action (*Ibid.*).⁵ I will return to the concepts enumerated above.

⁴ “Gramsci understood that dominant power in the twentieth century was [*exercised*] not always... simply by physical force but also through social psychological attempts to win people’s consent to domination through cultural institutions such as the media, the schools, the family, and the church.” (Kincheloe, 2008, 54).

⁵ They state that “...there are serious intellectual (and pedagogic) skills in dealing with the histories and debates surrounding the epistemological, political, and educational issues involved in justifying what counts as important knowledge.” (Apple, et al, 2009, 4)

This Paper

This paper is intended to shed light on this area of educational research, confining itself geographically to the two countries in question (Canada and the USA) where Gramsci has exerted and still exerts a tremendous influence. It centres around a number of key questions regarding Gramsci's relationship with CSE in North America. CSE in North America and elsewhere (for example the UK and Brazil) promotes the idea of schools and education more broadly as sites of struggle, despite any intention by those who have significantly influenced general education policies to have education become a source of social reproduction. As with hegemony in general, institutions or nominally capitalist-conditioned forms of reproduction contain within their own interstices the means of subverting the very same process they are meant to serve.

Many educators, whether salaried or otherwise, have served as the means of disrupting or unsettling hegemonic relations. In short, reproduction is not a smooth mechanistic process. It is this which allows educators of left wing persuasion a strong sense of hope, of teaching against the grain, of actually regarding teaching, in the words of Postman and Weingartner (1969), as a potentially subversive activity. And this is where Gramsci and others (e.g. Paulo Freire) become key sources of inspiration.

The first part will provide an overview of the key figures who have appropriated conceptual tools from Gramsci to discuss aspects of CSE in North America. Some of the scholars have used Gramsci in their CSE-oriented analyses of the educational systems in countries outside the continent. This reflects a tendency towards the internationalization of the CSE research carried out in North America. While North American universities command the international student 'market' globally, they simultaneously maintain an international composition among researchers and the professoriate. Both factors contribute to the international range and reach of research interests. The second part will be more analytic in scope and thrust. The analysis will be framed around the following points:

- a) The most important Gramscian concepts on pedagogy which have been appropriated by the leading North American intellectuals in CSE and the applications of these instruments in their respective analyses;
- b) The significance of these conceptual appropriations;

c) Commonalities and difference in the North American appropriation of Gramsci and other important thinkers in CSE such as Paulo Freire.

Part I: Key Exponents and Themes

Among the writings in CSE one comes across reactions to a very influential book on Gramsci and education that was authored by Harold Entwistle (1979), over forty years ago. He argued that Gramsci had advocated a conservative schooling for a radical politics.⁶ Arousing much controversy, his point was that one would be selling working class children short if one were to deny them the tools which allowed the bourgeoisie to govern, to be the *classe dirigente*. Important figures in critical approaches to education subjected Entwistle to their critique; among them were Henry A. Giroux, later to be joined, in critical pedagogy, by Peter McLaren and Donaldo P. Macedo, and Michael W. Apple. Giroux and Apple's critiques first appeared in *Telos* (Giroux, 1980a) and later in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (Giroux, 1980b) and *Comparative Education Review* (Apple, 1980). They indicated how the conservative readings of Gramsci, which followed Entwistle's orientation, neither tallied with Gramsci's writings on hegemony nor, for instance, with the need to avoid 'encyclopedic knowledge' (see Giroux, 2002: 49; Gramsci, 1975: 20, 21).⁷

Giroux, like Apple, continues to use Gramsci fruitfully in many ways. He retains his critique of Entwistle's reading of schooling, praising nevertheless the latter's rigorous research especially on the subject of adult education (Giroux, 2002). Giroux provides a more 'open reading' of Gramsci as part of an engagement with the Marxist tradition (Giroux, 1992: 13) which, he insists, needs to be revitalized. He carries forward this critique to confront the misuses of Gramsci by liberals and conservatives such as Alan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch regarding their advocacy of cultural literacy and the so-called Great Books. He expands the discussion to emphasise the role of hegemony (Giroux, 1981; Giroux, 1983) as a process that contains possibilities for change within its interstices. Like Gramsci

⁶ The other chapters referred to Gramsci's more general concepts and his views on Adult Education.

⁷ These include E. D. Hirsch in particular Giroux (2002), Buttigieg (2002) and also – somewhat – Guy Senese (1991) and Thomas Clayton (2005), the last mentioned praising Entwistle for carrying out rigorous research (p.57).

(Buttigieg, 2002a: 69-70; Buttigieg 2015: XII), he sees education, in its broadest sense, as central to hegemony.⁸ He emulates Gramsci in analysing a whole range of cultural production, also underscoring aspects of its underlying political economy, including film, public schooling, journalism, the entertainment industry, Higher Education and music (see Giroux, 2018). He captures the sense of creativity embedded in them, in which youngsters and adults invest. At the same time, he indicates how these popular culture areas are riven by contradictions and are subject to corporate encroachment. A full scale study on Gramsci features in one of these books (Giroux, 2000). He moves from the organic intellectual as cultural worker to the public intellectual examining intellectual life along the continuum of cementing and challenging hegemonic structures and relations. He finds Antonio Gramsci instructive in this regard (Giroux, 2006: 196). He does so by reiterating Gramsci's emphasis on the cultural as an important sector within the superstructure in which agency can be found. Culture, he and Roger I. Simon argued, echoing Gramsci, is a very important vehicle for the development, contestation and renegotiation of the present hegemonic arrangements (Giroux & Simon, 1989: p. 8).

The theme of intellectuals is also addressed by Peter McLaren, a key US-based Marxist, writing about the committed intellectual. McLaren *et al.* (2005), focus on Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual analysing it against post-Marxist and postmodern accounts of intellectual engagement based on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's "non-sutured nature of the social". Committed political intellectual work is discussed, by McLaren and his colleagues, against the background of a totalizing notion of capital. They argue that discourses are never divorced from a wider context of "objective labour practices or disentangled from social relations arising from the history of productive labor". (McLaren, *et al.*, 2005: 444) They bring social class back into the debate in CSE trying to separate class analysis from fashionable 'pseudo progressive fads' which throw out the class baby with the reductionist class bathwater.⁹

⁸ Buttigieg (2015) writes: "...in one of his early contributions to *Il Grido del Popolo*, entitled 'Socialism and Culture' (1916), Gramsci found occasion to argue at some length for the primacy of education, or culture more generally, in political struggle" (p. xii).

⁹ McLaren and Fischman criticise postmodernisms' appropriation of Gramsci to serve such ends as giving priority to representation and language to the detriment of the politics of social

The issue of social class, ethnicity and other forms of difference, with regard to Hegemony, is addressed by Donaldo Macedo. He and two colleagues (Bessie Dendrinis and Panayiota Gounari) demonstrate how language-work in education, and related areas, can never be neutral. It is very much tied to issues of power often on a global scale, relegating other languages to subordinate and marginal positions. This is demonstrated in work centring on Gramsci's conception of hegemony (Macedo *et al.*, 2013).¹⁰ Importance is attached to Gramsci's elaboration of language questions which come into prominence and highlight such issues as the enlargement of the ruling class and efforts to establish stronger and 'intimate' relations between powerful groups and the masses (Macedo et al, 2003: 17). As critical educator, Macedo and his co-authors criticised the pretence of 'objectivity' and neutrality of such schools as the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Macedo states that a professor there admonished a student, quoting Gramsci in a seminar presentation, for dropping "names of esoteric authors one stumbles upon." (Macedo *et al.*, 2013: 2)

Michael W. Apple is the other figure who stands out in the CSE literature in terms of continuously engaging Gramscian conceptual tools. He presents himself as a "neo-Gramscian" (Apple, 2012: XXVII). He engages Gramsci's notion of the state surrounded by a whole network of supporting structures (2004: 158) along the divide of civil and political society, more intertwined than the separation for heuristic purposes might suggest. Civil society is a site of contestation in which much of the struggle for power takes place. As he puts it, "to win in the state you must win in civil society" (*Ibid.*). The curriculum and paraphernalia related to it, such as textbook publishing, are key sites in the struggle over hegemony (Apple, 2004: 173). They help produce what he calls 'Official Knowledge' (*Ibid.*; Apple, 2000) (read: hegemonic knowledge –

class struggle (Fischman and McLaren, 2005: 17). The contention is that the international capitalist division of labour refracts oppressions such as those of race, class and gender. I infer from this that the task of the committed intellectual is to relate the struggles of new social movements to those engaged in by the 'old' Marxist movement targeting Capitalism's overarching structuring force.

¹⁰ According to Peter Ives (2004, 43) Gramsci first became aware of the concept of Hegemony through linguistics debates in which it featured. This is something, Ives contends, that was overlooked by scholars who attribute the origins of the term to the Russian Social Democrats, Plekhanov or Lenin. Ives (2010) also made a contribution to CSE through Gramsci by virtue of his writings on the hegemonic status of Global English and education, a work which, in many respects, complements that of Macedo et al. (2003).

hence they play a part in cementing hegemonic relations and challenging them). They constitute key sites for surrounding the state in changing relations of power which incorporates other sectors such as trade unions, including teachers' unions, to which Apple has been committed in many ways (Apple, 2004: 184). He argues, along Gramscian lines, for: "a struggle on a variety of fronts. One of these fronts is certainly education." (Apple, 2004: 121). He advises caution however when seeking these opportunities involving the state-civil society nexus, all part of the integral state, as there are moments when one might have to "look a gift horse in the mouth" (*Ibid*). A series of questions need to be posed, as one engages tactically as part of a larger strategy.¹¹

Apple, McLaren and Giroux espouse a Gramscian notion of the state, seen as a site of reproduction, resistance and cultural production with educators, from schoolteachers to other cultural workers (Apple, 2012; Giroux and McLaren, 1989) playing an important role. They are, after all, key agents in the struggle over hegemony. They operate at different levels of the state including municipal and regional levels, often opposed to the Federal state. Examples, in Apple's case, derive from Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil in the early 2000 (Apple, 2004: XIII).¹²

Two central scholars who have focused on the State from a Gramscian perspective are Martin Carnoy and Carlos Alberto Torres. Carnoy writes in detail on Gramsci when discussing the role of outside-of-school education. His view of Gramsci and formal education is expressed within the context of a number of theories of social and cultural reproduction that dominated Sociology of Education from the mid-seventies till the very early 1980s: "Schools therefore not only favour the children of the bourgeoisie; they are

¹¹ He says the state offers opportunities which can or should not be taken up. It all depends on whether they involve processes that can lead to structural change via civil society. Important strategic questions therefore need to be posed: "What reforms can we genuinely call non-reformist reforms, that is, reforms that both alter and better present conditions and can lead to serious structural changes?" (p.120)

¹² He writes: "After many years of electoral losses, the Workers Party has won consecutive elections in Porto Alegre and for a number of years had electoral control of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. One of the reasons it won was that it put forward a very different vision and set of policies for a more substantive set of democratic institutions. More democratic and participatory schooling was a central part of their proposals, as was an immediate and substantial increase in teachers' salaries, because they knew that teachers would not support proposals that simply caused them to work even harder for salaries that were declining each year." (Apple, 2004, XIII)

important to the maintenance of class based power relations. The schools, therefore, cannot be a source of developing proletarian hegemony” (Carnoy, 1982: 90) In this regard he sees Gramsci as projecting the Party as educator (*loc. cit.*), a position that overlooks the role of teacher and other movements as mediators in the process of cultural transmission, renegotiating relations of hegemony through schools and outside schools (Giroux, 1981, 1983).¹³ Carnoy’s emphasis on the party is often to the detriment of Gramsci’s views on schooling, the subject of much debates. He contends, much like John Holst, that, for Gramsci, the most important arena for education and counter-culture (a proletarian culture) is the party and not the school in opposition.¹⁴ Carlos A. Torres also wrote about the state in Gramsci (Torres, 1985) while simultaneously highlighting the Latin American resonance of Gramsci’s thought. He works, in this regard, in tandem with Raymond A. Morrow (Morrow and Torres, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2004). Their work has great resonance in North America given the massive presence of Latino/a communities. It brings to the fore the work of Paulo Freire on whom both Torres and Morrow wrote profusely. They advance the concept of the “two Gramscis” in their 1995 book:

In short, a depoliticizing view of educational reform (as the critical-social-appropriation-of-knowledge approach pretends, i.e., to create the citizen through enlightenment), as opposed to a political view (i.e., popular public schooling) that proposes using education and schooling as a tool in the struggle for hegemony. Is it the case that there are two Gramscis? (Morrow and Torres, 1995: 231).

More appropriately the question can be framed around the apparent contradiction of two views. On the one hand, there is Gramsci’s view of schooling. He argues for a ‘disinterested education’, as John Baldacchino (2002) points out in his perceptive essay, not ‘mortgaging the child’s future’. Then there are his views

¹³ This situation is quite akin to that of John Holst (2010, 2017) that it need not be rehearsed here save for his warning that we miss more than a trick when we overlook party in Gramsci’s strategy and as the fulcrum whereby the working class develops its intellectual independence (Holst and Brookfield, 2017, 202).

¹⁴ Influenced also by Claus Offe, Carnoy argued in the 80s for the state reconciling two arms, the accumulation of capital and the need to legitimise itself democratically (Carnoy and Levin, 1985). It is in this process of democratization, one infers, that one can find the space to renegotiate relations of hegemony.

on a wider education, including adult education, which resonate with those of Paulo Freire in the latter's popular education work. For Rebecca Tarlau (2017), Gramsci provides the theoretical framework for her analyses of tactical and strategic work involving the landless peasant movement (the MST) in Brazil (Tarlau, 2019), where Gramsci's figure, next to Freire, Makarenko and Guevara, looms large.¹⁵ She identifies a number of phases in a Gramscian war of position in the MST movement, namely: a) Grassroots leadership and the Myth of the Intellectual (*construed in its traditional sense – my italics*) (Tarlau, 2017, pp. 110 and 115); b) The Philosophy of Praxis and Common Sense (*Ibid.*, pp. 115-9); c) Public Schools as a terrain of contestation (*Ibid.*, pp. 119-23).

Among North American researchers who make use of Gramsci directly is a very influential adult educator, Stephen D. Brookfield. He focuses on the concept of the adult educator as organic intellectual (Brookfield, 2005: 108-12). Brookfield engages some of Gramsci's signature concepts to provide an overarching theoretical framework in which progressive and radical adult education can be carried out. This is in line with Gramsci's various endeavours regarding the pedagogical relational aspect of hegemony. This relational aspect is also availed of by D. W. Livingstone in research concerning workers' education where direct influence is drawn from the Factory Council writings (Livingstone, 2002). Livingstone highlights Gramsci's uncritical acceptance of the assumptions of Eurocentric modernism, very evident, I would add, in his *Notebook 22 – Gramsci's insights on Americanism and Fordism*. At the same time, Livingstone argues that Gramsci's insistence on working-class self-activity as the kernel of transformative work, continues "to offer a fruitful starting point for contributing to the democratic transformation of capitalist societies" (Livingstone, 2002: 237). Livingstone provides evidence to suggest that subaltern groups, including workers at different plants, persevere in exercising "their own creative and critical learning capacities both within and outside dominant class forms of knowledge" (*Ibid.*). The emphasis, in this

¹⁵ A number of North American-ensconced critical educators provide empirical work in the edited volume by Thomas Clayton, a US Professor working on language and comparative and international education at the University of Kentucky (Clayton, 2005). The rubric for the volume is Hegemony and the various case studies, contained therein, are preceded by an entire chapter, drawing on English and Italian sources, focusing on Gramsci and his signature concepts, penned by the editor.

study, grounded empirically in qualitative research, is on the social relations of production complemented by other related sites such as those of the household and unions (the former overlooked by Gramsci, the latter reactive to market dynamics rather than being expressive of autonomous working class interests and desires: cf. Livingstone, 2002: 234).¹⁶ Livingstone's work focuses on the relational aspect of hegemony, the counter-tendencies that it spawns, and the hegemonic and counter/oppositional cultures that are inextricably intertwined with them.

Meanwhile Stanley Aronowitz expresses a pessimistic view regarding the contemporary status of the 'philosophy of praxis,' thereby engendering more 'pessimism of the intellect' than 'optimism of the will'. (Aronowitz, 2002: 120).¹⁷ He argued that major sites of previously waged emancipatory struggles, such as trade unions, are foreclosed by their bureaucratization and their becoming business institutions.¹⁸ Jerrold L. Kachur (2002), for his part, takes the concept of the *Modern Prince*, or the party further in terms of contemporary intellectual work which, as with corporate transnational production, takes on the form of "anonymous intellectual practice" (Kachur, 2002, 325). He calls into question the adequacy of the term modern, regarding Machiavelli's legacy from *The Prince*, arguing for a far-reaching postmodern prince in this regard.

Part II: Analysis of Appropriation of Key Gramscian Concepts

The key concept appropriated in North American CSE is unsurprisingly Hegemony. While some scholars such as Giroux and McLaren focus on both its repressive (Giroux, 2010; McLaren, 2015a) and consensus side, others focus more on the consensual

¹⁶ Gramsci wrote the following in an article *Il fronte unico «Mondo» - «Tribuna» - Ancora delle capacità organiche della classe operaia* (*The United Front. 'World' - 'Tribune' Again the Organic Capacities of the Working Class*) in "L'Unità", 1 October 1926, reproduced in Livingstone (2002, 234): "if the [factory council] movement failed, the responsibility can be laid [addossata] not at the door of the working class as such but at that of the Socialist Party which came up short [venne meno] in its duties; which was incapable [incapace] and inept [inetto]; which was at the tail of the working class and not at its head. (my translation from the Italian original: Gramsci, 1964: 773 and also in Gramsci 1971b: 345).

¹⁷ This is often attributed directly to Gramsci without apparently any cognizance of the fact that it was coined by Romain Rolland.

¹⁸ He laments the situation among the US Left more generally which, he alleged in 2002, provides critiques of schooling but never on the side of a formative curriculum.

element (Apple, 2004).¹⁹ This is often related to the historical moment in which they advanced their research. They perforce highlighted the politics of schooling by confronting it with an alternative approach to learning within the interstices of state institutions such as schools. Teachers can be mediating influences in the process of cultural transmission and production. This approach can build on the form of resistance demonstrated by students; reproduction is not a smooth process. There can be counter-cultural education within the terrain of outside-school or popular education. Some hearkened to the role of social-class-committed workers' education in the dialectical relationship between capital and labour (Apple, 1982; 2012; Livingstone, 2002). Others highlighted ideas from Latin American popular education (Morrow and Torres, 2002, 2004; Torres and Morrow, 2001; Cavanagh, 2007; Tarlau, 2017). The influence of Paulo Freire and socialist-oriented labour education is strong in CSE. It would be unfair to state that these exponents highlighted only the ideological nature of education as opposed to repression but this literature could have had the effect of equating hegemony with consensus building only, rather than its being a feature of what Gramsci calls 'the integral state' (a term used by McLaren, 2015, 246) therefore hegemony = repression + consent.

The State, Hegemony and War of Position

The 'war of position', the trench warfare involving advances and retreats, often translating to working 'in and against' the system or, as they say in Brazil, being 'tactically inside and strategically outside' the system, has offered possibilities for agency inside state institutions such as schools. This has helped educationists and critical educators break from the old reproduction straitjacket and see education as one of many sites in which relations of hegemony can be renegotiated as part of a long revolution. Sheila Macrine writes:

one of the reasons that Gramsci remains so significant for the educational Left is that, unlike Althusser, Gramsci emphasizes the extent to which hegemonic power is always fragile – it is always held tentatively and always requires educational work. The work that teachers and other cultural workers

¹⁹ The use of force and the repressive state occurred not only under Republicans and New Right leaders as the two Bushes and Reagan but also Democratic Presidents – the *carceral state* (Giroux, 2020b, 28).

do is always political in that it produces knowledge and ways of seeing that represent the material and symbolic interests of particular groups of people (Macrine, 2016, 3).

CSE proponents find much purchase in the civil society terrain as a space where a ‘war of position’ can be waged.²⁰ Gramsci’s war of position and war of manoeuvre are central to the political and economic world in which we are currently situated. Apple’s argument, reproduced earlier, of treading warily even when opportunities present themselves, asking questions concerning overall strategy, is couched in terms of a ‘war of position’ (Apple, 2012: 121). The same applies to McLaren in his discussion on contestation. McLaren (2007) asserts that

we are currently living in ... a ‘war of position’” (p. 313) in that we are presently engaged in unifying a diverse network of socially and politically active net-works; this will allow an opportunity for a ‘war of manoeuvre’. For critical pedagogues, the classroom is a site [*among many other sites –my insertion*], for a war of position.” (*Ibid.*)

In adult education, Brookfield (2005: 112) argues in the same way:

The overall task of adult education will be to fight a war of position in which adults are helped to acquire a consciousness of their oppression and to organize in solidarity to struggle against that situation.

There is therefore room for large scale action within and across the institutions primarily, but not 100%, associated with ‘civil society’ (each institution has its repressive aspect, the school included). The state can be surrounded and transformed not just by agencies we associate with the non-formal domain or political parties, as argued by Carnoy and others, but also by institutions such as schools and universities as indicated by Apple, Morrow, Torres, Giroux and many others.

²⁰ Recall that a war of position involves social organization and the gradual assertion of cultural predominance for a shift in the basis of power which, only once this shift is created, with the ‘new cultural values’ steeped in popular consciousness, can the final push (through a frontal attack, a war of manoeuvre) for the conquest of the state occur. In countries where this war of manoeuvre occurred, as in Soviet Russia, the apparatuses of civil society need to be built for the revolution to be rooted in popular consciousness, otherwise it is bound to fail and exist only through a passive revolution, an imposition from above. Every genuine and popular revolution must be preceded by the diffusion of culture and spread of ideas on a wide scale for it to be grounded in popular and firm roots (Gramsci, 1977, 12; Gramsci, 1967, 19) as historically was the case with the Protestant Reformation.

Intellectuals

These institutions are meant to furnish society with most of its intellectual potential, though Gramsci, as is well known, broadens the definition of ‘intellectual’ cognizant of the thinking element that can be activated in any activity; all persons can therefore be intellectuals. The concept of intellectual, in Gramsci’s view, is analysed through a focus on not some immanent feature but a person’s function in society, generating or consolidating, through thought and action, a particular worldview.

This Gramscian view of intellectuals remains key among US- and Canada-based authors. It has become stronger in this day and age as a result of Trumpism and fake news. It has been there however for a long time in connection with analyses of a variety of opinion-makers regarding Neoliberalism – and its implications for everyday life – militarism and industrial, race and gender relations. Gramsci’s ideas and conception of intellectuals, in terms of organic, traditional, grand and subaltern, continue to hold sway in CSE. They hold sway in the current period of an ascendancy of a particular brand of ‘populism’.²¹ Giroux and others refer to this as:

a period of crisis which as Gramsci observed ‘consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born [and that] in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’ (Q3§34: 311; Gramsci 1971a: 276). Those morbid symptoms are evident in Trump’s mainstreaming of a fascist politics in which there is an attempt to normalize the language of racial purification, the politics of disposability, and social sorting while hyping a culture of fear and a militarism reminiscent of past and current dictatorships (Giroux, 2020b: 21).

Despite this perceived dwindling of public intellectuals there are still those who take up the role described by Gramsci. It is that of intellectuals defined through their function in rendering the worldview of ‘big business’ and the military-industrial complex part of everyday common sense. They operate as spin-doctors and influence opinions in a variety of sites such as prime-time television, blogs, op-eds, community radio [talk show] phone-ins, municipal assemblies, social movement activity, union locals, community halls, school classrooms and other learning settings.

²¹ The current phase is one wherein well researched and value driven democratising knowledge is at a premium or plays second fiddle to fabrications which are repeated over and over again to become part of the everyday mantras.

Giroux deals with public intellectuals, and he laments the gating of these intellectuals especially those within the academy. These criticisms are to be found not exclusively but certainly in his writings on Higher Education. Gramsci included these types in his repertoire of intellectuals without using the term ‘public intellectuals’. Giroux also wrote about many who would fit Gramsci’s category of subaltern intellectuals, addressing teachers as potentially transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988).²² Teachers, together with a large array of cultural workers, involved in a variety and at different levels of cultural transmission, are conceived of as organic intellectuals by many US proponents of CSE engaged in what Giroux calls “public pedagogy”. They are all agents in what Gramsci regards as “the pedagogical relation” that characterizes “every relation of hegemony” (Q10II§44: 1331; Gramsci 1971a: 350 [translation modified to use “pedagogical” rather than the 1971 “educational”]). As Apple puts it clearly:

As Gramsci – one of the most influential figures in the analysis of the relationship between culture and economy – notes, this has been one of the prime tasks of “intellectuals”, spreading and making legitimate dominant ideological meanings and practice, attempting to win people over²³ and create unity on the contested terrain of ideology. Whether we accept it or not, educators are in the structural position of being such “intellectuals” and, therefore, are not isolated from these ideological tasks (though many of them may struggle against it, of course). Again Gramsci’s insights are helpful. The control of the cultural apparatus of a society, of both the knowledge preserving and producing institutions and the actors who work in them, is essential in the struggle over ideological hegemony.” (Apple, 2012: 14)

It is to these educators, engaged as intellectuals, especially those who swim against the current, that North American and other CSE

²² The critical pedagogue, Sheila Macrine (2020) writes that, from the 1970’s onward, some critical educators, “writing on the interrelationships among education, culture and contested publics, have appropriated Gramsci to put forward a vision for teachers to become transformative intellectuals [*Giroux, 1988, my insertion*]to recognize the politics of the curriculum as implicated in the struggle for civil society (Apple 2003), and to challenge how neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies, policies, and political projects inform the changing nature of educational privatization efforts by the Right (Saltman 2000)”. (Macrine, 2016, 1).

²³ US-based critical pedagogue, Kenneth J Saltman (2020) underlines “the pedagogical dimensions of culture as a counter-hegemonic practice that involves acting in a Gramscian sense as a permanent persuader to educate the opponent to the common sense of organic intellectuals.” (p.74): again we respectfully point out that “counter-hegemonic” is a term never used by Gramsci.

appeal. Educators are exhorted to work towards transforming people into imagining a world not as it is but as it can and should be – a world governed by greater social justice, a democratic socialist world.

The concept of organic intellectual in party, social movement and revolutionary movement-oriented education (including higher and adult education) is demonstrated by the work of Peter McLaren, Stephen Brookfield and Henry Giroux. The last mentioned deals with this recurring theme in both Gramsci's pre-prison and prison writings. While Apple, Giroux, McLaren and others (e.g. Saltman) target education in general, Stephen Brookfield targets adult education as he includes Gramsci in his expansive view of Critical Theory which *noblesse oblige* focuses on the Frankfurt School but is extended beyond this coterie of writers:

The intellectual's task is to galvanize working-class opposition and translate this into an effective revolutionary party. In this analysis adult education is a site for political practice in which organic intellectuals can assist the working class in its revolutionary struggle. His idea of the adult educator as organic intellectual has been acknowledged by people as different as the Welsh cultural critic Raymond Williams [...], the African-American Philosopher Cornel West [...] – who views Black pastors and preachers as organic intellectuals – and the aboriginal educator Rick Hesch [...] To West [...], adult educators who work as organic intellectuals “combine theory and action, and relate popular culture and religion to structural social change (Brookfield, 2005: 112).

For Brookfield and others therefore the concept of “organic intellectual” continues to enjoy much currency in a view of pedagogy which is targeted at bringing about structural change and not simply ‘ameliorative’ reforms, the latter guided by a vision that does not transcend the present system. It is clear from this section that Gramsci's portrayal of the tasks carried out by people functioning as organic intellectuals, either supporting capitalism in its different phases or struggling to supplant it, furnishes North American CSE exponents with the means with which to analyse intellectual life.²⁴ He does so both on a large canvas, where education is viewed in its broadest meaning, central to the workings of hegemony, and in a narrower one of specifically designated and employed teachers working among children, university students and

²⁴ Gramsci's views intellectuals operating at different levels and in myriad spheres.

adults in general. One can add community members. The question which remains to be addressed is the topic of the next section: should organic intellectuals, engaging in CSE, operate within the context of party work or within larger, progressive frameworks such as those of social movements?

Party or social movements

A considerably big split in the literature is apparent between those who associate political education *a la* Gramsci with party or social movements.²⁵ John D. Holst has been critical of those favouring the latter for obscuring the notion of party (Holst, 2002; 2010). Freire-inspired educators would point to the importance of a party open to movements without taking them over as these have to retain their autonomy to be effective. This is indicated by the case in Brazil with respect to movements and the Workers' Party at the municipal level (São Paulo) as reproduced and commented on by US-based researchers, some with a Latin American background (O'Cadiz, Wong and Torres, 1998: 37).

Much depends on context. Giroux (2006) once called for a US third party, echoing Stanley Aronowitz (2006: 157-8) in this context:

Any viable attempt to challenge the biopolitical project that now shapes American life and culture must be organized through a multifaceted third party or, as Stanley Aronowitz argues, a radical party...Aronowitz further argues that a new party must not only address the concerns of the working and middle classes but must also join with "rank-and-file activists of trade unions, women's organizations, environmental and ecology movements, various factions of the freedom movements for Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and other oppressed peoples, and the anti-war and global justice movements to expose the illusion of democracy in the United States." (Giroux, 2006: 66-7)

Many, concerned with US politics, are reluctant to call for party and more likely to see in social movements a nodal point at particular moments in time. People however highlight the importance of context in this regard and have often pinned faith in

²⁵ Aronowitz laments that progressive social movements have renounced struggling at the level of world views, not having offered alternatives to replace the free market 'common sense' and the technical-rational (scientific) faith.

parties abroad, especially in Latin America.²⁶ They would have captured their imagination at specific times. These would include the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) in Nicaragua in the 80s, the PT (Partido Trabalhadores – Workers’ Party) in Brazil in the 90s and now the MST (O’Cadiz *et al.*, 1998; Tarlau, 2017, 2020). The MST had a historical affinity, though not affiliation, with the PT. Education of a critical nature operates at the intersection of both party and movements, although the most articulated and detailed accounts are of those operating in the context of social movements (*Ibid.*). There are cases when CSE proponents write about revolutionary pedagogy within a political movement, e.g. the *Frente Zapatista* (McLaren, 2000: 45-51) which always presented itself as a political movement and not as a party.²⁷

Most of the literature on these organizations by critical education researchers were in the field of comparative education. Exponents of CSE, such as US-based Gustavo Fischman and Peter McLaren (2005), however, write of “new bonds between labor and new social movements” (p.48), implying coalitions. They often invoke Gramsci’s adopted concept of “historical bloc”, also engaged by Carlos A. Torres (2013) with respect to Neoliberalism (formulating sixteen theses concerning aspects of education affected by Neoliberalism). It is used by many others often without proper nuanced explanations of this term which signifies a deep rooted, almost epochal relationship rather than simply an alliance which can be a contingency and therefore conjunctural and possibly ephemeral. The point to register is that Gramsci is used in the CSE

²⁶ The influence of Latin American popular education on North American critical education and practice is quite strong. Equally strong are Gramscian concepts that become a key feature of educational praxis in North America via Latin America where Gramsci holds a widespread influence as indicated by Morrow and Torres (1995, 2002) and Tarlau (2017, 2019). One such concept from Gramsci is that of “conjunctural analysis” in popular education adopted by the now defunct Doris Marshall Institute at the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice in Toronto. Canadian popular educator Chris Cavanagh (2007) states: “Naming the Moment has its core, a process of democratic *conjunctural analysis* [*my italics*], identifying and examining the movement of key forces (economic, political, cultural and so on) and their impact on various structures of society. The democratic nature of the process allowed participants to advocate for various actions according to the needs of the moment and to also recruit allies. As a popular education process, ‘Naming the Moment’ drew on a wide range of means of dialogue from the common small-group discussions to the use of popular theatre, visual art and song. And, as with popular education, it took more time and resources than more conventional processes of community organizing.” (Cavanagh, in Borg and Mayo, 2007: 44-5).

²⁷ According to McLaren: “They do not seek party representation via the state. Their Indigenous council has put forward spokespersons (Indigenous women) who do run for office, but the Zapatistas are not an official political party” (personal electronic correspondence).

literature through both a scriptural reading, emphasising party, or a more open reading around old and new social movements, trade unions, workplace (Livingstone, 2002) and party. In the latter case, this occurs if and when a party, open to structurally transformative policies, exists. In the work of many writers, such as Giroux, Aronowitz and McLaren, the call is for a combination of all the agencies listed, much depending on specific context.

What is significant about the conceptual appropriations from Gramsci is that they have provided a context for education for social justice-oriented change – struggling [*in and...?*] against the system. Hegemony provides the overarching concept for this struggle in education – a vision and a conceptual tool. It entails a series of steps and actions as part of an overall scheme, whose underlying vision *transcends* the given framework. We can obtain purchase here in Gramsci's view of the Factory Council. Prior and during the factory occupation, it was first expressed as an educative agency to *replace* the reactive trade unions – unions bargain within and do not transcend the given wage relation. Later, after the end of the factory occupation, it was conceived as an educative agency that *complements* the work of trade unions. It was to provide unions with a vision that does not regard the present 'industrial relations' system as establishing the boundaries of what is possible (TINA: There is no alternative). CSE and critical action are thus provided with a language of criticism and possibility (adapted from Giroux) guided by the process of imagining a world not as it is but as it can and should be.

It provides the sense of educating to challenge common sense, which contains elements of good sense but is fragmented, often characterised by a contradictory consciousness. Furthermore, it provides the challenge to not simply regard forms of art and culture as bourgeois, androcentric and racist but to read them 'against the grain' of obscuring different and alternative readings. These readings can make the vision connect with a "whole new way of life", in Raymond Williams' phrase. Gramsci's ideas, as adopted in CSE, are often mediated by Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall whose respective ideas have been so influential in CSE especially with Henry Giroux and Michael Apple. The influence of all three (Gramsci, Williams and Hall) is felt especially among those, echoing Giroux, who manage to bring *Cultural Studies* into educational

discourse and education into cultural studies (one North American-based exemplar, in this regard, is Handel Kashope Wright at UBC, Canada). Cultural Studies see forms of cultural production as sites of struggle where one works through the contradictions of cultural politics, sifting through the elements of good sense contained in common sense, and separating coherent ‘good’ sense from that which is wayward in one’s contradictory consciousness. Again, Henry Giroux is the one person who has done most to bring this mode of analyses into education drawing on Gramsci in the process. He draws on Gramsci’s exposition of the reconstructive, propositional element in Hegemony, including, in this specific case, cultural hegemony. A challenge for CSE, more generally, is to go beyond ‘ideology critique’ to contribute to the process of cultural renegotiation and renewal associated with working inside hegemony’s interstices.

Part III: Gramsci and Paulo Freire

Many of the writers to whom I refer here are beholden to Paulo Freire. Freire’s sojourn in the US, when in the process of publishing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos (Freire, 1970, 1993, 2008) from the original manuscript in Portuguese (Freire, 2013), was to leave a lasting legacy among critical educators in the USA and Canada. It is significant that this classic and one of the most important books in CSE, was first published in English translation in the USA. Daniel Schugurensky’s (2000) analysis of published efforts in comparing Gramsci and Freire indicates how the two are often mentioned in the same breath. In my view, rather than differing from Freire, Gramsci has strong affinities with the Brazilian, a point Freire himself underlines (Freire, 1995, 63-4). The key concept found in both is *Praxis* which is the kernel of Freire’s pedagogical politics (the Pedagogy of Praxis) and Gramsci’s overall philosophy (the Philosophy of Praxis). It is central to the CSE discussed by most of the writers mentioned in this essay. As an example, I draw from McLaren in this regard:

Life in Schools is the story of my reinvention as an educator, from a liberal humanist who pressed the necessity of reform to a Marxist humanist who advocates a revolutionary praxis. By “revolutionary praxis,” I mean educating for a social revolution through critical pedagogy. The unfulfilled or unrealized

democracy that I envision is unashamedly socialist (McLaren, 2015b: xvii [reprinted from the fifth edition of 2007; first edition 1989]).

Some CSE authors combine insights from Gramsci and Freire. Both underline the politics of education and the sense of commitment and competence necessary not to allow a democratic education to degenerate into *laissez faire* pedagogy. Freire, for the most part, highlights moving from popular knowledge to a higher level of thinking. For him, knowledge is dynamic and needs to be co-investigated collectively. Gramsci, for his part, infers this in urging the ongoing struggle to move from common sense to good sense as indicated, for example, by Apple (2004, 157). Gramsci celebrates the creative spirit that lies within the popular but also provides examples of how ‘disinterested’ knowledge, as emphasised by Baldacchino (2002) in his critique of a ‘sociology of knowledge’ approach, can enable people to engage with this knowledge in the search for the creation of a new *civiltà*.

Freire gives examples, primarily from the popular, to indicate the existential situation from where one must begin to move to higher order of thinking, Gramsci does likewise with his fascination with popular forms of knowledge and manifestations of the creative spirit. He however also covers areas such as theatre, philosophy, novels (including popular serial novels) and forms of art to examine ways by which they can contribute to a new *civiltà*. These areas and others, including film, television, advertising, music and the entertainment industry, are also the domain of CSE proponents. Critical educators such as Giroux use Gramsci in their analysis of the cultural realm to scour this vast field and therefore broaden the terrain of enquiry for an education based on praxis.

They do so, however, without overlooking their indebtedness to Freire for providing them with some of the language and conceptual tools that form part of their battery. What Freire offers such pedagogues are examples of pedagogical approaches, context-conditioned, that are consistent with an overarching ‘philosophy of praxis’. Gramsci, for his part, highlights the importance of not throwing out the *powerful knowledge baby* with the *ideological bath water* (see this essay, footnote 4). There is some hegemonic knowledge that one must know to survive and thus be able to transform.

General Conclusion

There is no doubt that Antonio Gramsci is an iconic figure in CSE in North America. We have seen how the above writers, in the main, draw and most creatively build, on his 'open' approach to Marxism. They avail themselves of the light he shed on different aspects of the local and international body politic, through his journalistic writings, theatre reviews, cultural and political economic analysis in his pre-prison and prison periods (including the letters). All this renders him an important person to think with in the quest for a critical approach to education. This openness is instructive for those seeking new pathways in a variety of fields including education which, when viewed in its larger dimensions, is central to his conception of Hegemony, every relationship of which, to reiterate one more time, is unmistakably pedagogical.

I have not seen any reference to Gramsci in CSE used pejoratively, either in North America or beyond. Beyond CSE, of course, there are gross misrepresentations of Gramsci. All this is part of a bid to denigrate him and render him an integral scarecrow in the 'communist bogey' on which US right wing politics, including pedagogical politics, feed in their quest to foment scare-mongering. CSE writers, by and large, together with writers from a range of areas, provide an important riposte. In his analysis of the relation between education and power, there are several insights for a democratising education, with, to my mind, much more still to be explored for CSE praxis in Canada and the USA.

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