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Gramsci and the Unitarian School
Paradoxes and Possibilities

Reference to the work of Antonio Gramsci is *de rigeur* for a number of people who engage the historical materialist tradition to explore educational and cultural initiatives for social transformation. Often referred to as the Lenin of the Occident (Morrow and Torres, 1995), Gramsci was mainly concerned, in his work and writings, with the development of a revolutionary strategy for complex Western societies characterized by regional differentiation, uneven levels of development (central to the capitalist mode of production) and a variety of social groups struggling for justice and a greater share of power.

A huge corpus of writings has rendered quite popular such important Gramscian terms as those of hegemony, the Sorelian concept of a historical bloc, the notion of a Modern Prince and such distinctions as those between organic and traditional intellectuals, common sense and good sense and "war of manoeuvre" and "war of position." This chapter will therefore not attempt to repeat what so many other works have done, namely that of explicating the broader meanings and ramifications of these Gramscian concepts. Such explanations are also to be found in the literature dealing extensively with Gramsci and education (see Broccoli, 1972; Manacorda, 1970; Entwistle, 1979; Ireland, 1986; De Robbio, 1987; Monasta, 1993; Coben, 1998; Mayo, 1999; Allman, 1999; Capitini and Villa, 1999). Passing references to these concepts will be made, since the reader's acquaintance with them is being assumed. The major focus of this chapter will be on the "Unitarian school" (see Baldacchino, 2002), arguably the most controversial aspect of Gramsci's

writings on or relevant to education. We argue that, when viewed in the context of Gramsci's larger body of writing and therefore his overarching view of the workings of power, this piece, and other related writings on intellectuals and the organization of culture (Gramsci, 1971a), can easily strike the reader as being full of paradoxes.

Intellectual and Moral Reform

In Gramsci's work, one finds the critical application of Marxist tools of analysis for the study of a specific context—the Italian post-Risorgimento state. It is this specific application which rendered Gramsci's work of great interest to scholars and activists operating in contexts denoting strong cultural affinities with Gramsci's Italy, the Latin American context being a strong case in point (see Ireland, 1986; Arico, 1988; Coutinho, 1995; Melis, 1995; Morrow and Torres, 1995, 2002; Fernandez Diaz, 1995).

Gramsci's insights were intended to explore possibilities for an "intellectual and moral reform" (see Caruso, 1997) which would emancipate the masses from an old order that was mainly characterized, according to Gramsci, by "a mythological conception of life and the world" (Gramsci, 1975a, p.495). The new order, the most radical reform since primitive Christianity (Festa, 1976), would accomplish "nationally that which liberalism only managed to gain for restricted sections of the population" (Gramsci, 1975b, p.1292).

The cultivation of a revolutionary conscience among the deeply religious peasants that would rupture the "reactionary and anti-State bloc made up of the landowners and the great mass of backward peasants, controlled and led by the rich landlords and priests" (Gramsci, 1978, p. 346), was markedly different from Croce's idealism. Gramsci's polemic with Croce centered mainly around the latter's claim of having solved the problems of metaphysics, transcendence, and theology: "Croce takes every opportunity to underline how, in his activity as a thinker, he has studiously tried to eradicate from his philosophy any residual trace of transcendence and theology and hence of metaphysics as understood in the traditional sense" (Gramsci, 1995, p. 346).

For Gramsci, Crocean historicism "is still at the theological speculative stage" (Gramsci, 1995, p.348). By contrast, according to Gramsci, the philosophy of praxis "is the historicist conception of reality liberated from any residue of transcendence and theology even in their latest speculative incarnation" (Gramsci, 1995, p. 348).

Religion was central to Gramsci's critique. Gramsci criticizes Croce for accepting religion as a form of primitive philosophy necessary for the people. Croce, according to Gramsci, deepens the gap between intellectuals, to whom he addressed his philosophy, and the people to whom religion is sufficient:

> But Croce has not "gone to the people," has not wanted to become a "national" element (just as the Renaissance men were not, unlike the Lutherans and Calvinists), has not wanted to create a group of disciples who (given that he personally might have wanted to save his energy for the creation of a high culture) could popularize his philosophy in his place and try to make it into an educational element right from the primary school stage (and thus educational for the simple worker and peasant, that is to say for the simple man in the street). (Gramsci, 1995, p. 408)

In response to Croce's elitism, Gramsci maintains that one of the main tasks of the philosophy of praxis is that of elaborating a philosophy that tries to weld intellectuals and people together in a "historical bloc." The organic rapport that is established between intellectuals and masses is born within the masses themselves: "Everyone is a 'philosopher' ... even if in his [*or her*] own way, unaware, because even in the minimal manifestation of any intellectual activity, language, there is contained a determined conception of the world" (Gramsci, 1975b, p. 1375).

In Gramsci's view, historical reality is not something that develops over people's heads. Human beings are not objects but *subjects* in the historical process, intervening consciously in reality of which they are themselves agents. With this in mind, Gramsci calls for an analysis of religion as an ideological and historical fact. This analysis forms part of a larger project whereby:

> The dualistic and "objectivity of the external world" conception, as it has taken root in the people through the traditional religions and philosophies that have become "common sense," can only be uprooted and substituted by a new conception intimately fused with a political programme and a conception of history that people recognise as the expression of its absolute necessities. (Gramsci, 1995, p.409)

Ideology

Gramsci transcends the assumption that social change is affected only by purely structural considerations (Ransome, 1992), maintaining that the "claim ... that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism" (Gramsci, 1971b, p.407). It was his sincere hope that the "philosophy of praxis" would undergo a process of emancipation, initially going through a phase marked by crudity, before being elaborated into a "superior culture." This, after all, occurred with the Lutheran reform and Calvinism, both initially giving rise to a popular culture and only much later developing into a "superior culture" (Caruso, 1997, pp. 85, 86).

For Gramsci, philosophy constitutes the medium through which a true moral reform can be brought about. Philosophy constitutes an intellectual

order "which neither religion nor common sense can be" (Gramsci, 1971b, p.325). Philosophy, in fact, is "criticism and the superseding of religion and 'common sense.' In this sense 'philosophy' coincides with 'good' as opposed to 'common sense'" (Gramsci, 1988, p. 327). Within an ideological bloc, philosophy exerts the most profound influence over the conceptions of the world of auxiliaries and subaltern classes.

Unlike traditional philosophy, religion and common sense

> cannot constitute an intellectual order, because they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness. Or rather they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence within an individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness. Or rather they cannot be so reduced "freely" for this may be done by "authoritarian" means, and indeed within limits this has been done in the past. (Gramsci, 1988, p. 327)

Gramsci identifies popular religion with common sense, which he describes as the "philosophy of nonphilosophers"; that is, "the conception of the world absorbed uncritically by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man develops. Common sense is ... the folklore of philosophy" (Gramsci, 1975b, p.1396).

While maintaining that the rapport that exists between philosophy and common sense is similar to the one that exists between philosophy and religion, Gramsci clearly identifies common sense with religion: "The principal elements of common sense are provided by religion, and consequently the relationship between common sense and religion is much more intimate than that between common sense and the philosophical systems of the intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 420).

To overcome this inorganic and incoherent way of thinking and actualizing a true cultural reform, one has, according to Gramsci, to identify the residues and stratifications in common sense, the legacies of previous philosophers and religions.

Folklore, besides religion and common sense, is another aspect of the subaltern culture which needs to be studied in depth in order to arrive at a real *weltanschauung* and at a real "intellectual order." For Gramsci, folklore is a conception of the world that contains a specific body of beliefs, norms and values (Salamini, 1981). It can be understood only as a reflection of the people's conditions of life. Folklore is not only unelaborated and uncritical, but contradictory and ambiguous in its content.

According to Gramsci, a conception of the world is unable to permeate a whole society and become "faith" unless it demonstrates itself capable of replacing preceding conceptions and "faiths" at all levels of social life. Thus, Gramsci's insistence on a "study of how the ideological structure of a dominant class is actually organized: namely the material organization aimed at

maintaining, defending and developing the theoretical or ideological 'front'" (Gramsci, 1988, p. 380).

Gramsci's writings are to be seen as an ongoing process for the elaboration of a variety of concepts, Marxian and non-Marxian, with the idea of an "intellectual and moral reform" in mind. The quest for agency is a key feature of Gramsci's work as he seeks to break away from the crudity of economic determinism and avoids the imposition which characterizes the Leninist "vanguard" approach, an imposition generating a "passive revolution."

The emphasis throughout Gramsci's writings is on ethical agency. Both the party and the state were regarded as ethical agents and educators. The party was conceived of as the Modern Prince unifying the various groupings in society into a "national-popular unity" in the same way that Machiavelli's *Principe* was to unify the nation. While force is not ruled out in any process of hegemony, the emphasis is placed, throughout Gramsci's formulations, on the winning of consent. Writing in his *Note su Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo Stato Moderno* (Notes on Machiavelli, on politics and on the Modern State), in the *Quaderni,* Gramsci states: "In reality, the State must be conceived of as 'educator,' in that it tends to create a new type or level of civilisation."[1] Gramsci goes on to argue that, although it functions essentially on the basis of economic forces, it cannot leave superstructural matters to their own devices, to develop spontaneously, but acts as a means of rationalization, of acceleration, of Taylorization, operating according to a plan, exerting pressure, inciting, soliciting and punishing.[2]

Civil Society

It is through the institutions of *burgherliche gesellschaft* or civil society, conceived of by Gramsci in a manner that is different from Marx (Bobbio, 1987), that much of the educational work (both hegemonic and counterhegemonic) takes place. The concept of the State is one of the most elusive in the social sciences. Gramsci confirms this, using the term differently in different contexts. It assumes a relational sense in his writings on the factory councils and workers' democracy (see Gramsci, 1997, pp. 63–73), where the democratic nonhierarchical social relations he advocates, in this context, prefigure the new socialist state. Here the conception is close to Marx's notion of the State as not being a thing, what Philip Corrigan calls "Thingification" (Corrigan, 1990, p. 264),[3] but a "relation of production" (Corrigan, Ramsey, and Sayer, 1980).

On the other hand, in Gramsci's conception of the state, in his writings on the State and Civil Society (cf. the *Quaderni*), it assumes something akin to Lenin's "armed bodies of men (sic)" being surrounded by a network of ideological institutions that form civil society. Gramsci believed that it is in the domain of the party and the institutions of civil society that the organic intellectuals of the subaltern classes (*classi strumentali*) must operate, working

to engender an "intellectual and moral reform" suiting the interests of these classes. For Gramsci, and with specific reference to the Italy of his time, these classes were, of course, the industrial working class and the peasant class.

Unlike the way it is used in much of the progressive literature in education, community development and social activism (see Korsgaard, 1997), civil society is regarded, according to the Gramscian conception, not as "an arena of popular oppositional politics" (see the critique in Mayo, 1999, p.6) but as the terrain which consolidates the present hegemonic arrangements. "According to this conception, civil society is regarded as an area that, for the most part, consolidates, through its dominant institutions, the existing hegemonic arrangements, but which also contains sites or pockets, often within the dominant institutions themselves, wherein these arrangements are constantly renegotiated and contested" (Mayo, 1999, p. 7).

Education

For Gramsci, education takes place in a broad range of activities beyond the confines of "educational" institutions. Adult education played a key role in Gramsci's conception of education. His own involvement in a wide variety of projects—ranging from worker education circles, the factory councils and the *Club di Vita Morale*, to the Institute of Proletarian Culture, the Communist Party's (PCd'I) correspondence school and the *scuola dei confinati* (prisoners' school) at Ustica—testifies to his faith in such a domain of political education (see Adamson, 1980; Ransome, 1992).

Much has been written on the role of adult education in Gramsci's thinking, as indicated in a review of the English language literature on the subject (Mayo, 1995) and in a number of published books (Ledwith, 1997, 2005; Coben, 1998; Mayo, 1999; Allman, 1999; Borg, Buttigieg and Mayo, 2002). While stressing the importance, in Gramsci's conception of counterhegemonic activity, of a wide-ranging educational/cultural action (see Manacorda, in Gramsci, 1972, p.xv) that includes different forms of what can be termed "adult education," it would be pertinent to focus, in the rest of this chapter, on his conception of the school, or more specifically, the "Unitarian school." This is, after all, the longest and most coherent piece on education to be found in Gramsci's oeuvre. We shall start by highlighting some aspects of Gramsci's writings on the subject.

The Unitarian School

Gramsci's writings on the school reflect a concern, on his part, with respect to the means whereby working-class children can gain access to the "cultural baggage" which he felt they needed in order not to remain on the periphery of political life. The piece on education was written partly in reaction to the

riforma Gentile of 1923, the educational measures introduced by the Fascist education minister and idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile which were intended to reform the old *Legge Casati* (Gramsci, 1971h, p. 36). The *Legge Casati* antedated the Italian nation state since it was established in 1859 "as an act of the Kingdom of Sardinia" (Todeschini, 1999, p.190). The Gentile reforms entailed a two-tier system of education, consisting of grammar and vocational schools. Gramsci felt that these reforms would lead to "juridically fixed and crystallized estates rather than moving towards the transcendence of class divisions" (Gramsci, 1971b, p.41). The vocational schools were felt to be limited in scope (distinctly utilitarian), likely to commit violence on the working class by mortgaging the children's future ("ipotecare il futuro del fanciullo") at such an early age, rendering them "incubators" of "small monsters" programmed for a specific occupation (Gramsci, in Manacorda, 1970, p. 32). They were therefore likely to confirm working-class members in their social location, denying them access to the kind of knowledge and baggage which would enable them to move in from the margins of political life. Gramsci advocates the creation of an accessible "Unitarian school": "The common school, or school of humanistic formation (taking the term "humanism" in a broad sense rather than simply in the traditional one) or general culture, should aim to insert young men and women into social activity after bringing them to a certain level of maturity, or capacity for intellectual and practical creativity, and of autonomy of orientation and initiative" (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 29).

The common school would consist of two phases. During the first phase, the emphasis would be on discipline, rigor, the acquisition of basic skills and exposure to what Gramsci regards as a "disinterested" (for no immediate practical ends) humanistic education. In the second phase, the emphasis would be placed on creativity, discipline and preparation—not just for university but also for work "of an immediately practical character" (Gramsci, 1971b, p.32). The school is to be a residential place "with dormitories, refectories, specialized libraries, rooms designed for seminar work etc." (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 30). It is to make up for the working-class child's lack of a stimulating home environment, which gives the middle-class child a decisive advantage in access to the educational resources. Because it is intended to be an essentially humanist school, emphasis will be placed on traditional academic subjects.

The education provided in the first phase would be rigorous. With regard to this, Gramsci underscores what he regards as having been the virtues of learning such a moribund subject as Latin. He argues that bringing a dead corpse to life—the metaphor he employs to describe the process involved in learning this subject—served the purpose of inculcating certain habits of diligence, precision, poise (even physical poise) and the ability to concentrate on specific subjects (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 37). He also states that, in the process

of learning the subject, "logical, artistic, psychological experience was gained unawares, without continual self-consciousness" (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 39). This indicates that Gramsci considered it imperative, regarding working-class children, to "accustom them to research; to disciplined, systematic reading; to setting out their convictions in a clear and objective manner" (Gramsci in Bellamy, 1994, p.52). Paradoxically, for someone who loathed the kind of vocationalism introduced by the Gentile reforms, Gramsci seems to be advocating what some authors in Italy have often referred to as the "Taylorization of schooling." Gramsci's fascination with Taylorization and its ability to generate socially the psycho-physical-sexual habits necessary for production is well known. The inculcation of the above qualities was not a feature of the kind of education propagated by Gentile that therefore favored middle-class children. These children were still capable of acquiring these skills from their home environment. This enables them to enjoy a monopoly over the acquisition of these skills. The acquisition of such qualities was considered essential by Gramsci for a class aspiring to power.

The emphasis on "logic" also reflects a conviction of Gramsci's, namely that the ability to think logically and coherently is not something innate in human beings; it is a skill which has to be mastered. Once again, Gramsci criticizes the Gentile Reform for failing to take this into account; the implication being that, as a result, working-class children are denied access to a skill which he must have considered fundamental for them to be able to convert "common sense" to "good sense." Gramsci also regards as detrimental to working-class interests a curriculum that encourages dialogue and participation without the necessary degree of instruction (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 36). He argues that whereas in the traditional school, the pupils acquired "a certain 'baggage' or 'equipment' (according to taste) of concrete facts ... now, the modern teacher fills the children's head with formulae and words which usually mean nothing to him [*sic*] and which are forgotten at once" (ibid.).

It is fair to assume that Gramsci argued for a pedagogical process characterized by dialogue intertwined with a certain degree of instruction. For Gramsci, if "the nexus between education and instruction is dissolved," the whole would merely constitute an exercise in rhetoric (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 36). In a letter to G. Lombardo Radice, a follower of Giovanni Gentile, Gramsci explains, with respect to the pedagogical strategies adopted by the *Club di Vita Morale,* that:

> The student reads, takes notes and then presents the results of his researches and reflection at a meeting. Then someone—a member of the audience, if someone has prepared, or myself—intervenes to make objections, suggest alternative solutions and perhaps explore the broader implications of a given idea or argument. In this way, a discussion opens up, which ideally continues until all those present have been enabled to understand and absorb the most important results of this collective work [*sic*]. (Gramsci in Bellamy, 1994, p. 52)

With respect to the issue of instruction and facts, Gramsci stresses that there cannot be a passive learner, a "mechanical receiver of abstract notions" (ibid., p. 34). Information and knowledge are, according to Gramsci, refashioned by children in their consciousness, which, he argues, reflects the social and cultural relations to which they are exposed (ibid., p. 35). All this indicates that Gramsci believed that the transmission of knowledge from educator to educatee is not a mechanistic process but a highly complex one that involves a strong element of mediation and individual appropriation. In Gramsci's view, therefore, people can critically appropriate aspects of the established knowledge (including the "canon") for their own specific ends.

Critical Reaction

Arguably this is the most controversial piece in Gramsci's writings on education and culture. It has excited the interest of scholars because of its apparent advocacy of a "conservative" educational system. Entwistle (1979) argues that, in this piece, Gramsci posits a somewhat paradoxical theory of a conservative schooling for a radical brand of politics—this interpretation drew adverse criticism from a number of writers, namely Apple (1980), Giroux (1980, 1988, 1999a, 2002), Holly (1980), Hoare (1980) and Buttigieg (2002). Gramsci's advocacy of a strong sense of rigor in his writings on the school, underlined by Entwistle (1979) and, later, also by Senese (1991) as well as by Broccoli (1972), De Robbio (1987) and Saviani (cf. da Silva and McLaren, 1993), becomes the focus of much of our commentary on this aspect of his work. There is no denying the fact that, in this piece, Gramsci attaches great importance to a broad humanistic education. This somehow reflects his own location with respect to the issue of education as a form of empowerment. Gramsci must have been very reluctant to renounce that very same education which had enabled him to transcend his impoverished environment to emerge as a leading intellectual in the Italian left. Lest we forget, Gramsci came from a "meridionale" (southern) background (facing all the prejudice and patronizing attitudes this generates in the industrialized North). He also had to endure a variety of hardships. There were the great physical hardships: he suffered from what would nowadays be diagnosed as *Potts Disease* and blamed his parents for giving in to popular superstitions regarding disability, fabricating explanations as to its cause, and not taking the necessary medical measures at the right time.[4] And, of course, the hardships were also social, with his father having been arrested on charges of petty embezzlement (see Germino, 1990; Lepre, 1998), a situation which led him to prematurely enter the world of hard physical labor (carrying heavy registers), which must have continued to have a deleterious effect on his health. The specific kind of education he acquired, moving through the various *licei* and eventually his interrupted (because of health and financial

reasons) studies for a *laurea in lettere* with a focus (*indirizzo*) on philology (he was considered by Italy's leading linguist, Bartoli, to be the next great Italian linguist, the "archangel" to defeat the "grammarians"), must therefore have meant a lot to him. These personal, psychological factors should, we feel, be borne in mind when considering his pedagogical views. Why deny working-class members the same cultural capital that enabled him to obtain "by blood and tears" what came naturally to the sons of the Italian ruling class, whom the students of Gramsci's compatriot, Don Lorenzo Milani, would refer to as "i figli di papà" (daddy's children; see Chapter 8)? The "figli di papà", as we explain later on in this volume, are those who, through a class-conditioned process of social and cultural reproduction, occupy dominant positions in the Italian power structure (Scuola di Barbiana, 1996, p. 10).

It is, however, precisely this that highlights what *prima facie* appears to be a paradox in Gramsci. Few would need reminding that Gramsci is one of the foremost exponents of the theory of hegemony, based on a recognition of the manner in which dominant forms of thought and practice permeate the people's consciousness, including the consciousness of subaltern groups, contributing to the fashioning of their subjectivities. And yet, despite this obvious recognition, Gramsci seems to be, in this particular piece, evoking the virtues of a classical humanistic education, predicated on Eurocentric knowledge—what today would be termed the "selective tradition" or the "great books" (see Giroux, 2002, Buttigieg, 2002)—in short, the kind of class-biased curriculum which favors one particular kind of "cultural capital" at the expense of another. Morrow and Torres (1995) provocatively pose the question: are there two Gramscis? Is there not a paradox here? Entwistle (1979) underlined the paradox in the title of his very controversial study concerning Gramsci's views on schooling: *Conservative* schooling for *radical* politics (our emphasis). Is this what Gramsci is really advocating, given his widely acknowledged tremendous insight into the workings of power and his explanation of how hegemony is developed? Was he singularly unobservant, failing to spot an important contradiction in his work? Or was he, like the seventeenth-century English poet John Donne, exploring possibilities that can emerge from apparent paradoxes?

Gramsci was very much concerned with the way a particular class develops its own intellectuals. The piece on education strikes us as constituting an attempt to explore what the "old school" (Gramsci's own term, not ours) offered the ruling class (*classe dirigente*) in terms of producing its own intellectuals. Are there elements of this school which can prove beneficial for a class or group aspiring to power? Does a new group coming into power require a complete overhaul of the educational system? Should the dominant established culture be ignored—a complete break with bourgeois culture, as some would have it? This kind of thinking had been affirmed in Russia following the Bolshevik revolution, and it was strongly opposed by both Lenin and

Trotsky (Morgan, 1989, pp. 47, 48). Lenin stated unequivocally: "Proletarian culture is not something that has sprung from nowhere, it is not an invention of those who call themselves experts in Proletarian culture. That is all nonsense. Proletarian culture must be the result of the natural development of the stores of knowledge which mankind [*sic*] has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist society, landlord society and bureaucratic society" (Lenin, in Entwistle, 1979, p. 44; Lenin, in Broccoli, 1972, p. 66).

One of the recurring aspects of much of the radical literature in education is its focus on popular culture as an important terrain wherein hegemony occurs. One might argue that this is as it should be, given the role popular culture plays in enabling one to come into subjectivity. But, as Dennis Haughey (1998) points out with respect to adult education (and we feel this applies to critical approaches to education in general), "largely lacking ... is the ability to function fluently in the language of the dominant culture so as not to be relegated to the periphery of political life" (p. 211). Haughey made this point with reference to what educators—adult educators, in his specific case—can learn from Gramsci. As critical educators, we ignore the dominant culture and intellectual traditions at our peril! "Cracking the code," through critical appropriation, must have been considered by Gramsci, and other writers (see the chapter on Lorenzo Milani in this book), as an important means for members of subaltern groups to enter the corridors of power and begin to transform the existing hegemonic arrangements. No established institution is monolithic, according to the Gramscian conception of power on which we drew in Chapter 2 with regard to the European Union. The textuality that institutions furnish us with can be read against the grain, an insight which Gramsci himself provides (anticipating later poststructural theories). He indicates, in the piece on education in Notebook 4, that there is never a passive receiver of knowledge or facts. Texts are open to multiple readings and are "rewritten" or reconstituted in the recipient's mind according to the specific social and cultural relations to which she or he is exposed (see, once again, Gramsci, 1971b, p. 35).

Furthermore, we feel that there is nothing really conservative about Gramsci's advocacy of aspects of a humanistic education for working-class children. There is, after all, a long tradition, within the international working-class movement, of negotiations and struggles, some of which were highly successful, intended to secure for workers access to a humanistic education. In his own country, for instance, the trade unions secured educational leave (known as the hundred and fifty hours) precisely to provide workers with a humanistic education which, they felt, would be empowering, unlike vocational education which, they believed, primarily served capitalist interests (cf. Yarnit, 1980). The same applies to the United Kingdom where the Workers' Educational Association and the trade union movement in general have been instrumental in securing a humanities education for workers via

extramurals provided by the universities or through a variety of programs, including those provided by such residential institutions as Ruskin College, Oxford. In the 1990s, we witnessed criticism of the U.S. government on the grounds that a humanities education, or an education in the liberal arts, has "always occupied a subordinate position vis-à-vis the dominant languages" (Giroux, 1990, p. 10)—the dominant languages, in this case, being those that promote "the instrumentalist" view of education (ibid.). Gramsci's advocacy of aspects of a humanistic education is therefore well in keeping with a socialist vision which has often found, in this type of education, elements for a logical alternative to an "instrumentalist" education. The "instrumentalist" type of education favors capital (it would normally be inspired by Human Capital Theory). Gramsci tends to suggest that it is the "instrumentalist" type of education that the Gentile Reform was to make available to working-class children through the separation between "classical" and "vocational" schools. Gramsci's critique of this education and the kind of "streaming" (tracking) which he sees it as bringing about is also well within the radical tradition of repudiating any kind of differentiation in the quality of schooling claimed to be made on the basis of "meritocracy." In effect, the whole process is one of social selection on the basis of class (see Curtis, Livingstone, and Smaller, 1992), a point that will be made again in the chapter on Lorenzo Milani and the School of Barbiana (Chapter 8). That Gramsci was capable of making such a critique in the thirties, rather than the sixties, shows remarkable foresight on his part.

Harold Entwistle (1979) argues that the emphasis that Gramsci places on the acquisition of a baggage of facts suggests that Gramsci "held a view of learning which is not inconsistent with the notion, now used pejoratively, of education as banking" (p.47). This would, once again, appear to be quite paradoxical, coming from a man (Gramsci) who denounced the popular universities precisely because their directors and educators filled the stomach with bagfuls of victuals ("sporte di viveri") which could have also caused indigestion but did not leave any trace and did not touch the learners' lives in a way that could have made a difference (Gramsci, 1972, p. 83). He felt that the popular universities emulated the old Jesuitical schools where understanding is fixed and is not regarded as the culmination of a long process of inquiry (Gramsci, 1972, pp. 84, 85).

To say, as Entwistle does, that Gramsci favored "banking education" can be somewhat misleading. A close reading of Gramsci's text, one which devotes great attention to his choice of words, would indicate that what he was averse to is the encouragement of uninformed dialogue. For Gramsci, a process of uninformed dialogue is mere rhetoric. It is mere laissez-faire pedagogy which, in this day and age, would be promoted under the rubric of "learning facilitation" (sic). This is the sort of pedagogical treachery which provoked a critical response from Paulo Freire, the subject of the chapter that follows. In an exchange with Donaldo P. Macedo, Freire states categorically that he

refutes the term "facilitator,"[5] which connotes such a pedagogy, underlining the fact that he has always insisted on the *directive* nature of education (see, for instance, Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 103; Freire and Macedo, 1995, p. 394). He insists on the term "teacher," one who derives one's authority from one's competence in the matter being taught (see, for instance, Freire, in Freire and Macedo, 1995, p. 378). As one of us argued elsewhere, laissez-faire pedagogy "often results in members of an 'in group' gaining the upper hand, abusing of the pseudodialogical process and silencing others" (Mayo, in McLaren and Mayo, 1999, p.402).

One may therefore justify Gramsci's reservations concerning such practice on the grounds that it favors middle-class children who can monopolize the learning activity, silencing other pupils from subordinated groups by virtue of their possession of the relevant cultural capital. What Gramsci seems to be advocating is a process of education which equips children with the necessary acumen to be able to participate in an informed dialogue. This is why Gramsci writes in terms of a "nexus between instruction and education" (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 36). This immediately brings to mind Freire's statement that there are moments when one must be 50 percent a traditional teacher and 50 percent a democratic teacher (Freire, in Horton and Freire, 1990, p.160).

The emphasis here is on "authority and freedom," the distinction posed by Freire (see, for instance, Freire, 1998) but which echoes Gramsci's constant reference to the interplay between *spontaneità direzione consapevole*—"spontaneity" and "conscious direction" (see, for instance, Gramsci, 1977a, pp. 70–74). In his piece on the Unitarian school, Gramsci calls for a balance to be struck between the kind of authority promoted by the old classical school (without the excess of degenerating into authoritarian education) and the "freedom" advocated by his contemporary proponents of ideas associated with Rousseau's philosophy as developed in *Emile*. The latter type of education, for Gramsci, had to develop from its "romantic phase" (predicated on unbridled freedom for the learner, based on his or her spontaneity) and move into the "classical" phase, classical in the sense of striking a balance (Gramsci, 1971b, pp. 32, 33). This is the balance between freedom and authority (see Gadotti, 1996, p.53).

That Gramsci despised "Banking Education" can be seen from the language used in the following quote: "In reality a *mediocre* teacher may manage to see to it that his pupils become more *informed*, although he *will not succeed in making them better educated*; he can devote a scrupulous and bureaucratic conscientiousness to the mechanical part of teaching [*sic*]" (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 36; our emphasis in italics).

Although, for Gramsci, it is better to provide children with information than encourages them to engage in dialogue in a vacuum, he nevertheless regards the teacher who engages in this process, one of instruction, as

"mediocre" and one who does not help the children become "better educated." This association between straightforward instruction and mediocrity reflects Gramsci's views concerning "Banking Education." After all, this is a writer who, elsewhere in his writings of the same period, advocated a reciprocal dialogical relationship between intellectuals and masses. It should be a relationship in which "every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher" (Gramsci, 1971b, pp. 349, 350). He repudiates the Leninist notion of a "top-down" vanguardist transmission style and emphasizes the reciprocal basis of consent.

The issue concerning the merits of Greek and Latin also warrants consideration. Here is another paradox and a point of contrast with a position associated with Lorenzo Milani's pupils from the school of Barbiana. In Chapter 8 we will show that the Barbiana students preferred the learning of a contemporary history (say post–World War I) to the learning of a history concerning earlier periods (School of Barbiana, 1969, p. 26) in that they found in this history a much greater connection with life (ibid., p. 27). And here we have Gramsci apparently advocating the study of two dead languages for the rigor involved in bringing a corpse to life. But is he explicitly advocating the study of Greek and Latin? Alternatively, as part of an inquiry into how the bourgeoisie creates its own intellectuals, is he exploring the benefits this knowledge offered those who studied the two languages? In highlighting what he considers to have been the merits of the two subjects, Gramsci is merely making the point that there is need for an area or areas in the curriculum which would instill in the pupils a sense of rigor, the sort of rigor which will stand working-class children in good stead when in control of their own environment. This should not, of course, be taken to mean that Gramsci advocates the inclusion of Latin and Greek in a curriculum intended to be beneficial to the working class. On the contrary, he clearly states: "It will be necessary to *replace* Latin and Greek as the fulcrum of the formative school, and *they will be replaced.* But it will not be easy to deploy the new subject or subjects in a didactic form which gives equivalent results in terms of education and general formation, from early childhood to the threshold of adult choice of career" (ibid., pp. 39, 40; our emphasis in italics).

In an extension to the earlier quote, concerning the need for the pupil to acquire a "baggage" or "equipment of concrete facts" (Gramsci, 1971b, p. 36), Gramsci states that "it was *right to struggle against the old school* but reforming it was not so easy as it seemed" (ibid.; our emphasis in italics). Once again, as the Marxist figure accredited with having developed the theory of hegemony, Gramsci must perforce have been fully aware of the implications of certain practices and normalizing discourses associated with the "old school." This explains his being in favor of a struggle against it (Manacorda, in Gramsci, 1972, p. xxlx).

What he seems to be doing, in this piece, is highlighting the qualities which the "old school" managed to instill and which, he felt, one should not overlook when restructuring the schooling system, if such restructuring is to be carried out with the interests of subaltern groups in mind. Critically appropriating elements of the old in order to create that which is new constitutes a recurring theme in Gramsci's writings, as a number of writers pointed out (e.g., Giroux, 1980, 1988; Hoare, 1980; Mayo, 1999). But the old humanistic school, in its entirety, has to be replaced since it no longer serves present realities.

The problem for Gramsci was that the process of reform introduced by Gentile, possibly through the influence of his mentor and predecessor as minister of education, Benedetto Croce, was not any better. It struck Gramsci as being more retrograde when measured against the ideal of a fusion between the academic and the technical. The old school had much more merit, Gramsci seems to be saying, with the rider that there are aspects of this institution which can be critically appropriated and, if they are to be replaced, need to be substituted adequately. As Mario Alighiero Manacorda argues, with respect to the note on the Unitarian school, what Gramsci has provided is an "epitaph" which celebrates what the humanistic school was and what it cannot be any longer, since the social reality has changed (Manacorda, in Gramsci, 1972, p. xxlx).[6]

Our focus on these details will hopefully provide the basis for a careful reading of Gramsci's educational writings. We argue, however, that, in any attempt to draw sustenance from a writer for the purpose of a democratizing project in education, one should be wary of not engaging in a scriptural reading of the texts in question, a point Coben underscores (1998, p. 201). This becomes even more important when bearing in mind what Gramsci tried to do in this note: extol the virtues of the old school to show that the Gentile reforms represent, in contrast, a retrograde step and not an improvement in terms of ensuring social justice.

There are important issues that come to mind in the context of a Unitarian school. These are issues that came to the fore, in educational debates, in the 1970s, forty years or so following Gramsci's death. One issue that arises is: what passes for "humanistic" knowledge? Should such knowledge be deemed problematic? To what extent does it embody the dominant ideology? Does it necessitate the schoolchildren's acquisition of a particular "cultural capital" so that those who have access to it possess an advantage over those who do not ? Can this problem be overcome simply through the creation of a boarding "Unitarian school"? Would this Unitarian school coexist with other private or church-run humanistic schools (a key educational issue in this part of the world)? Furthermore, there is nothing in Gramsci's piece to suggest that aspects of working-class life, or the life of any subordinated group for that matter (e.g., peasants), can be

included in any of the two phases of the proposed "Unitarian school." If the proposed school was intended to be an important site for the conversion of "common sense" to "good sense," then we feel that the potentially emancipatory elements of this "common sense" (which Gramsci equates with culture), together with elements of the culture of other subordinated social groups, should form part of the curriculum. The emphasis on the ability to crack the dominant culture code is most welcome. But then there should always be room to render popular culture as an integral feature of the learning process where the focus does not lie solely on the written word,[7] a limitation in Gramsci's cultural (including popular culture) writings (Forgacs and Nowell Smith, in Gramsci, 1985, p. 345; Mayo, 1999, p. 108). This would be in the interest of developing a radically democratic education with a "national-popular" character.

This point becomes ever so pertinent in this day and age when we are constantly witnessing the emergence of multiethnic and multiracial societies, the subject of our last two chapters in this book. This might not have been the case with Italy in Gramsci's time, but it is certainly the case with this country today and, as this book shows, the rest of Southern Europe. Italy is a major recipient of immigrants from various parts of the globe, notably from different areas in Africa, including the Maghreb and Macharek states. That there is the need for a different and more inclusive school, in these circumstances, is a point which is constantly underlined in the various discussions taking place in Italy with respect to the need for a critical multicultural education (see Richter-Malabotta, 2002). And yet, ironically, it is to Gramsci that certain authors have resorted to obtain insights concerning the current debate on multiculturalism (Apitzsch, 2002), though certainly not to the piece on the Unitarian school.

If one seeks to develop a genuinely multicultural curriculum, then, as we will argue in the last two chapters, one must break away from the Eurocentrism in which Gramsci's thinking seems to be immersed, a feature he shares with many other thinkers in the Marxist tradition, a product of eighteenth-century Cartesian thought. These thinkers would, of course, include Karl Marx. As David W. Livingstone has stated: "Marx as well as subsequent orthodox Marxists and most critical Western Marxist intellectuals have operated from a Eurocentric world view which has regarded European civilisation as the dynamic core of global life" (Livingstone, 1995, p. 64).

All told, in his epitaph on the old humanistic school and his indication as to what is worth salvaging from it and what needs to be replaced adequately, Gramsci presents us with a formidable challenge. We are prompted to address the issue of what really renders the school a genuinely "Unitarian" institution, guided by the principles of social justice, equity and inclusion (in its broadest sense).

Notes

1. Our translation. The original reads: "In realta 'lo stato deve essere concepito come 'educatore,' in quanto tende appunto a creare un nuovo tipo o livello di civiltà" (Gramsci, 1972, p. 61).

2. Paraphrased from the original in Italian in the *note su Macchiavelli, sulla Politica e sullo Stato Moderno,* Gramsci (1972, p. 62).

3. See also Corrigan and Sayer (1985).

4. See Aurelio Lepre's excellent biography (1998, pp. 4–5).

5. Freire actually stopped using the term since he had used it in his early writings such as the piece "The People Speak Their Word: Learning to Read and Write in São Tome and Principe" (1981).

6. Literal translation from Mario Alighero Manacorda's introduction to his anthology of writings on pedagogy by Gramsci (Gramsci, 1972).

7. Gramsci made a substantial contribution to the study of popular culture involving the written word, writing numerous pieces on popular literature (see, for example, Gramsci, 1977b, pp. 121–166).