

Peter Mayo, ed.

Gramsci and Educational Thought.

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Peter Mayo's anthology *Gramsci and Educational Thought* is described as a 'very variegated and rich compendium' (3) of contributions from Gramscian scholars and specialists from Brazil, Canada, Germany, Malta, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is meant as a tribute to the educational influence of one of the twentieth century's greatest social thinkers and political theorists, and a contribution to the growing international literature on the educational thought of Antonio Gramsci.

I approached this anthology with the interest of someone researching and teaching about the anti-hegemonic and emancipatory capacity of education. What Mayo's book offers is a look at the educational implications of Gramsci's work from a variety of perspectives. As with any anthology, some chapters are better than others, and the audience for each may differ. With this in mind, I approached the collection from the stated theme of Antonio Gramsci's educational thinking, *id est*, that education in a broad context is a central aspect of cultural hegemony. Judged as such, I found the chapters by Hill, Mayo, Holst, and Ives to be especially noteworthy.

The foreword by Michael A. Peters and the introductory chapter by Mayo contextualize Gramsci, situating the book and the subject matter in relation to the work and life of Gramsci. In Chapter 1, 'A Brief Commentary on the Hegelian-Marxist Origins of Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis', Deb J. Hill provides a philosophical and explicative discussion of Hegel and Marx's influence on Gramsci and his philosophy of praxis. She teases out the connections between the iconic Italian philosopher and his equally iconic German influences, arguing, 'reading Gramsci's pre-prison and prison notebook legacy entails understanding the specific nuances of (a) Hegelian-Marxist vantage point' (6). Hill discusses how the Hegelian-Marxist legacy of struggle—which is to say, the struggle to grasp the powers of the self in opposition to the alienating form of subjectivity inherent to the logic of capitalism—is at the very depths of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis, his historical-dialectical worldview, and what he termed the educative-formative problem. This was one of my favorite chapters, as Hill really gets at the heart of Gramscian philosophy, and thus at the heart of his ideas concerning education.

Chapter 2, 'Antonio Gramsci and his Relevance to the Education of Adults', is an analysis by Mayo of Gramsci's comprehensive and educational strategy, a strategy 'intended to engender intellectual and moral reform...(in which) educational programmes targeting adults featured prominently' (21). Mayo discusses the central role education plays in Gramsci's political project, and how adult education can play a key role in systematic and counter-hegemonic action. Adult educators, says Mayo, can and should draw inspiration from Gramsci's revolutionary philosophy of praxis. This chapter's strength is in its explicative nature and its framing of the educational thought of Gramsci.

In Chapter 3, ‘The Revolutionary Party in Gramsci’s Pre-Prison Educational and Political Theory and Practice’, John D. Holst pushes the discussion of Gramsci’s conceptualization of the nature of education beyond the *Notebook* tracts on schooling and the Unitarian school, and focuses instead on Gramsci’s pre-prison writings. As the title of the chapter suggests, it is about education within the context of party work. Holst’s goals ‘are to outline Gramsci’s interrelated conceptualization of the roles of the revolutionary party; the nature of education within and by the revolutionary party; and the aims of the party education’ (39). Holst’s intent is to take Gramsci beyond the dogma that surrounds his theories, and portray Gramsci’s radical adult education in terms of the struggles of the working class for whom it was intended. Holst achieved his goals in this informative chapter.

Chapter 4, Thomas Clayton’s ‘Giovanni Gentile: The Philosopher of Fascism’, introduces the man who was Italy’s minister of education and responsible for the scholastic reform that Gramsci criticized. Clayton finds it incredible that so few Gramsci scholars writing in English have explored Gentile, a pattern that he claims is mirrored among education scholars, especially since Gramsci himself described Gentile as a great contributor to the field of thought (58). Clayton’s goal is to begin filling the void around Gentile, and in doing so shed light on the educational thought of Gramsci.

In Chapter 5, ‘Global English, Hegemony and Education: Lessons from Gramsci’, Peter Ives delves into Gramsci’s discussion of the connection between language/grammar and cultural hegemony (i.e. language politics), and the globalization of English. Along with the chapters by Hill and Mayo, I found this to be amongst the anthology’s best. Ives offers an astute analysis of Gramsci’s approach to language politics and education, and to the debate on global English. To Ives’ credit, we are also provided with a nuanced unpacking of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony.

Chapter 6, ‘Antonio Gramsci and Feminism: The Elusive Nature of Power’, by Margaret Ledwith, provides a feminist and Gramscian analysis of community development. Her argument is that Gramsci provides ‘feminism with the tools with which to make sense of the personal as political through the concept of hegemony and female-specific forms of coercion and consent’ (111). As an argument for the relevance of Gramsci to feminism, it is a fine piece. But it does not address Gramsci’s educational thought to the same extent that the chapters that precede it do; rather, it is more about making use of Gramsci within a context. An ardent scholar of Gramsci, or someone focusing on Gramsci’s educational thought, should bear this in mind when reading this chapter.

In Chapter 7, ‘Towards a Political Theory of Social Work and Education’, Uwe Hirschfeld discusses Gramsci’s relevance for social pedagogy, situated within the educational, social, and cultural scene of Germany. This chapter, like Ledwith’s, is more about Gramscian ideas within a context—in this case social work—than it is about Gramsci and his educational writings. Hirschfeld explains the two goals of his chapter: ‘to contribute to the development of a political/radical analysis of social work...[and] to

shape (it)... The chapter attempts to realize these aims within the context of Gramsci's hegemony' (114). To me, this chapter seemed out-of-place. While I found some of what it had to say to be informative—and I am an advocate of socially inspired pedagogy—I discerned here the absence of any significant connection to the overall theme of the book, i.e., to the educational thought of Gramsci.

In the book's final chapter, Chapter 8, 'Gramscian Thought and Brazilian Education', Rosemary Dore Soares discusses the diffusion of Gramscian ideas in Brazil. She traces the politics and project for public education within Brazil from the beginning of the 20th century. This is a very focused chapter that identifies the differences between Marx's and Gramsci's educational ideas, while delving into the diffusion of Gramscian thought in Brazil in the 1980s. While this chapter is more congruent with the theme of Gramsci's educational thought than the two previous chapters were, it may be of less interest to the general reader.

Overall, and despite its somewhat modest length (of just over 150 pages), *Gramsci and Educational Thought* is a commendable and scholarly collection.

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