

# Gramsci and Education

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# Agenda

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3. Gramsci and Education  
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# Who was Gramsci?

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) was an Italian Marxist philosopher, political theorist, and revolutionary who is best known for his contributions to the understanding of cultural hegemony, the state, and the role of intellectuals in society. Gramsci's ideas have had a significant impact on various fields, including education.



# Antonio Gramsci

- He was influenced by Karl Marx
- He co-found the Italian communist party
- He was prisoned by Mussolini.
- He wrote his 'Prison Notebooks' in prison.



# Gramsci and Education

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- For Gramsci, education was central to his concept of hegemony. More importantly, hegemony was an educational process.
- Using a Gramscian framework helps to analyse the state and society and identify the role of education policies in maintaining the state's supremacy.
- Ruling classes maintain their power, their hegemony not only through force but also through cultural and ideological means, and education is a part of this.

# Gramscian concepts

## Hegemony

- Hegemony can be understood as the 'domination of a particular ideology as common sense in society, domination is so complete that it becomes internalised by the mass of the people' (Morgan, 1987,p.302).
- Looking at Gramsci's (1971) own definition of hegemony, he perceived it as a situation in which a social group or class exercises 'intellectual and moral leadership' in order to dominate opposition groups (58).
- To create a new hegemony, in opposition to that of the current one, can only be achieved by a subordinate group transforming people's ways of thinking and their understanding of the world – their common sense.
- Society acknowledges and employs the ideas of the dominant system as its common sense. Education is one of the tools used to construct a new common sense; by being educated within the dominant system, a people's common sense develops in favour of the system (Gramsci, 1971).
- Counter hegemony: resisting the established hegemonic order.

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# Gramscian concepts

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## Civil Society:

In Gramscian sense, civil society has a specific and nuanced conventional usage. Gramsci's concept of civil society is part of his theory of hegemony.

Civil society can be described as that part of the social order that is neither the power of the state nor the realm of the market and exchange (both state and non-state) in which hegemonic power is exercised. It includes education and social welfare services (often state institutions), religious bodies and voluntary organisations (for discussion see Allinori 2016; Heper and Demirel 1996; Shukla 2009). Gramsci's analysis of these bodies led Gramsci to argue that the political state and civil society are 'the same thing' (1971, 60).

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Gramsci distinguishes between civil society and political society. Political society refers to the traditional institutions of political and state authority, the military, and the legal system. Civil society, on the other hand, includes a wide range of institutions and organizations (so-called) outside the state apparatus, such as government, media, and schools.

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For Gramsci, the state is not just a coercive apparatus, but it also includes both civil and political society. Civil society, therefore, is not separate from the state, rather, it is one of the elements that make up the entire social order.

As Gramsci argued that the ruling class maintained its dominance not only through political and coercive means but also through ideological and cultural leadership. Civil society, in this context, becomes a site of cultural production, where the ruling class exercises cultural hegemony—shaping the values, beliefs, and norms that are accepted as **common sense** by society.

To create this common sense, the state does not just demand consent; it also educates this consent, by means of the political and civil associations (Gramsci, 1971, p. 259). Edward Said (2003) described this 'consent' process as the influence of the state (the army, police, central bureaucracy and state) on the civil society (schools, families and unions) through cultural hegemony.



# Gramsci and my work

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- **My thesis**

"Basic Education and Hegemony in Turkey: Thinking on Ideology, Policymaking and"

- **Publications:**

"Educational policy-making and hegemony: monolithic voices from civil society"

Ecem Karlidag-Dennis, Simon McGrath & Howard Stevenson

"Hegemony and the neoconservative politics of early education policymaking"

Ecem Karlıdağ-Dennis, Zeynep Temiz & F. Melis Cin

- I explored Gramsci's ideas to look at the education policy and reforms and link power.
- I conducted interviews with civil society (media, teacher unions and policy makers) to understand the relationship between the state and education.

Education is one of the tools to build a new common sense: by being educated within the dominant system, people's consciousness is shaped in such a way as to consolidate and reinforce this system (Gramsci 1971).

# Educational policy-making and hegemony: monolithic voices from civil society

- Data collected between 2013 and 2016
- Focussed on the interviews that were carried out with teacher union members and journalists.
- Interviews were conducted with a total of seven union officials from three different unions.
- Access issues.
- Interviews were conducted with the lead education correspondents from five key newspapers. Two of these newspapers are known to be pro-government, two more liberal and one pro-secularist. One had a number of its staff detained after the coup, but none were closed down.
- Looked at the issue of rise of religion and religious schools in Turkey and how polarisation within the country provided power to the ruling class.

# Discussion questions

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1. Can you identify examples of how educational systems in different countries may either reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies?
2. How can different institutions in civil society (re)shape an educational system?
3. How can education be a site for fostering hegemonic or challenging hegemonic ideas?