“Each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations, but of the history of these relations.” Gramsci (1971, p.353)

Discussing the future of development education at a gathering such as this conference, we need to remember to look back and review the nature of the historical traditions in education as a means of gaining a better understanding of where we have been and where we might be going. In this paper, I will review some of the historical experiences of radical adult education in the hopes that history will inform our dialogue about development education’s future. It is said that only by understanding our past do we gain insight and vision for our future. Too often we ignore history and some have even pronounced it dead, but I believe our perceptions of history, as well as our understanding of our current existence are disjointed and confused. We place historical facts and figures into little boxes making it difficult to see that history is human agency, dynamic and fluid. I hope to engage your attention as we connect the vibrancy of the past to our continued struggles of today and tomorrow.

This work is part of research for a dissertation in critical pedagogy examining the political praxis of the Irish Socialist James Connolly as an example of Gramsci’s organic intellectual. Within the field of radical education, critical pedagogues are appealing for models of radical educators and their work (Allman, 1997; Holst, 2000; Lovett, 1988; McLaren, 2000). Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich represent some of the main contributors to this field. In their commitment to the process of social and economic transformation, they maintained the view that human agency must be guided by critical understanding combined with action. Educational and cultural actions are identified as potential instruments for liberation that can prepare people for change. These actions develop individual human agency encouraging people to challenge hegemony and change the world with new alternatives. Accounts of revolutionary education provide examples of “rupturing and destabilizing the dominant ideological imperatives of white, patriarchal,
capitalist society through strategies of demystification and decolonization” (McLaren, 2000 p. 104).

As the minority world orchestrates the “development” of the majority world, the materialistic and cultural hegemony of capitalism is strengthening. Diverse cultural and economic systems are usurped to create new consumer markets. Natural and human resources are exploited to provide for a privileged life-style of a minority. History is managed as a tool to accommodate the advancement of a capitalistic world-view by presenting its progress as natural and inevitable. Whenever possible, attempts are made to make commodities out of the spirit of resistance and manufacture it into a t-shirt or produce it into some advertising slogan. Capitalism continues to mutate as a means of ensuring its survival, but causing social and economic contradictions and distortions of democracy. So how can we expect to understand 21st century globalisation? We need to understand the complex and inter-related mechanisms of hegemony. Gramsci reviewed different historical movements against dominate social groups and explored how past endeavours sought to cultivate new world-views. Following this method, we can better appreciate how to unveil the underlying contradictions (Allman, 1988). We need illustrations of social justice, human courage and transformation. We need signposts to guide us on the long march.

Antonio Gramsci provides a framework that is liberating and democratic. It is less deterministic and pragmatic than the more orthodox Marxist view which assumes history is on their side and revolution is inevitable. Reformulating historical materialism, Gramsci’s perspective places more emphasis on intellectual and cultural influences rather than on economics. His theoretical assessment, established by extensive examination of historical events, conclude with the belief that history is stimulated by ideas and produced by individual’s human will. His theories also accentuate the continuous relevance of the past on the future. We are all the result of past social, political and economic relations and our history is the expression all these associations.
Intrigued by how socially dominant groups maintain control, Gramsci studied historical records and saw that leadership is based on cultural and moral ascendancy, as well as economic and material predominance. Gramsci explored the concept of hegemony and characterized a major aspect of it being the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting an existing power structure. Utilising multiple tactics, like schooling and media, the prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population and becomes part of what is generally called “common sense”, so that the values, culture and philosophy of the dominate group or class comes to appear as the natural order of things, (Boggs, 1976, p. 36). Hegemony is the result of an ideological bond between the rulers and the ruled. The consigned meanings, values and actions are sanctioned by a vast network of cultural organisations, political movements and educational institutions. Transformative education’s strategy is to break that bond and transform the capitalist domination. This is achieved by the working-class and other subordinate groups to independently develop their own hegemony.

As educators looking for signposts for transformative education we must be committed to or at least recognize that Gramsci’s educative project is political. It is a deliberate and democratic process that is cognitive of the complexities of the social and economic world and is committed to the development of alternative structures and relationships that will transform the lives of millions of people. “It is based on a conception of knowledge, ideas and consciousness that are both an expression of the material world and as a creative transforming agent - a dialectic notion” (Boggs, 1976). Within a Gramscian framework then, nurturing class consciousness is the key to the transformation process. The process includes the cultivation of critical forms of theoretical consciousness that actually engages with practical activities, developing thought and action into praxis and giving it a sense of its own historicity and its ability to change the world.

The theory of praxis connects our experiences with our consciousness. It encourages us to change how we think and realise that there is no reason to be dominated by circumstances. While we may agree that it is people who produce their history, we must also acknowledge they
are not always in control of the material and economic relations that affect the levels of influence they might have on the production of their own history. But the critical examination of the historically specific relations of a particular phenomenon displays a complex and accurate understanding of it. This performs the dialectic – the unity of opposites, which allows us to explore how opposites are related and the nature of that relationship. It provides the insight that we have a choice about the types of economic and social structures under which we exist. Praxis transforms our relationships with others by dialectically unifying our experiences with our thinking. It will aid us in our activities to “realise [our] own essence, [our] human, [our] communal essence” (Marx, 1844, p. 122).

Gramsci recognised that revolutionary transformation is a continuous progression. He has provided an analysis of the educative process and concepts of politics which helps us to appreciate the relationship of education to social and political change (Coben, 1998, p.6). We are supplied, not with a blueprint, but with a framework and an understanding that creating a socialistic democracy requires cultural and political education. Institutions and associations of working-class culture and committed leadership need to be nurtured so that they can challenge and cultivate alternatives to capitalist relations (Allman, 1988).

**Signposts**

Gramsci’s work is rooted in the Marxist principle of human agency which maintains that the purpose of human life is the ability to become fully human by being critical and creative producers of existence, our society, ourselves and our destinies. According to Gramsci, this social agency is contingent on the cultivation of a critical consciousness and the development of one’s own concept of the world, and not by some prescribed concept created by elements in the external environment (Gramsci, 1971, p. 323).

Therefore, our first and major signpost is the formation of an autonomous and hegemonic consciousness. This is a process starting with self-knowledge; the “understanding [of] one’s own historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and duties” (ibid p. 11). There is
movement from a pre-political to a political consciousness. Comprehending the complex principles and social hierarchies embedded within all relations, we can begin to become independent of the hegemonic influences that define our world and our relations.

A critical understanding of oneself comes through the struggle of political hegemonies, of opposing directions, first in the field of ethics, then politics, culminating in a higher elaboration of one’s own conception of reality. The awareness of being part of a determined hegemonic force (political consciousness) is the first step towards a further and progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice finally unite. So the unity of theory and practice is also not a given mechanical fact but an historical process of becoming, which has its elementary and primitive phases in the sense of “distinctiveness”, of “separation”, of barely instinctive independence, and progresses up to the real and complete possession of a coherent and unitary conception of the world. (ibid, p.333)

Within the field of education, there are ideological tensions and aspirations indicative of the different varieties of political perspectives. Scanning the socialist movements from the past, we can see the conflicting strategic perspectives reflected in ‘the burning question of education’. The Parliamentary Socialists represented the view of social democracy and supported the development of national education. Educational opportunity was a citizen’s right and a means of social mobility; it would bring about the ‘silent social revolution’ as it provided an opportunity for people to rise out of their class. As reformers, their programmes were based on a gradual and evolutionary progression towards social change. Another group, the revisionists, were of the opinion that socialism was a form of civilised and humanised capitalism and viewed education as an end in itself. Literacy and popular enlightenment would prevent the evils of ignorance. And finally, the revolutionary socialists rejected the social democracy of the bourgeois order and viewed education as a means for social and political emancipation and control.
Like other revolutionary socialists, Gramsci regarded State education as an instrument of class-rule; it is shaped by and for capitalism’s ideological and material needs. Gramsci believed the socialist movement’s most important work was of a cultural and educational nature. In order to establish a culture independent of the dominant conceptions of the world, workers and other subordinate groups must have self-determining education. Recognising the power and process of culture, Gramsci states that “every relationship of hegemony is an educational relationship” (ibid, p. 350). Truly transformative education must be liberated from the influences of ‘traditional’ intellectuals, who Gramsci identified as those who maintain and reproduce the status quo. Intellectual autonomy from the ruling minority, allows for greater levels of awareness.

David Montgomery (1987), in his study of the educational process at Work People’s College (1907-1941) stated that “class consciousness was more than the unmediated product of daily experience. It was also a project”

German socialists in 19th century Chicago actively sought to create their own spaces and education as a means of countering the effects of capitalism. Like other revolutionary socialists, they utilized traditional cultural organisations, like singing societies, cooperatives and meeting halls, establishing spaces and events that were the centre for organising, educating and political action. The Workers Clubs, which could not occur in Germany because of repressive laws against worker organisations, sprung up in Chicago as forums for cultural and political activities and became a fundamental element of a distinctive American worker culture (Schied, 1989). These clubs were the heart of cultural and social movements and a rich assortment of techniques were used to provide education about socialist ideals and its relationship to other topical issues. Many radical traditions found a cultural home within the socialist club life. Many workers clubs purchased their own halls as a means of ensuring their own self-sufficiency for their meeting places, libraries, schools, recreation centre and mutual benefit societies. These organisations touched every aspect of a workers life.

The Socialist Finnish Community in Minnesota viewed education as an essential factor in preparing for the future. It saw the American public education system as training their children
to reject “the enthusiasm and social aims of their socialist parents” (Altenbaugh, 1989). This community developed a model which attempted to preserve Finnish culture, promote literacy and install socialist ideals. The People’s Work College (1907), influenced by the Finnish model also did not educate workers to “rise out of their social class” but trained them “to become a more powerful factor in the class struggle”. Many other socialists perceived independent worker’s education as a means of developing counter-hegemony as well as cultivating worker solidarity. Workers education was political education; it introduced critical class consciousness into everyday economic, political and social practice.

Another signpost of transformative education stressed by Gramsci is the development of a common language to facilitate the creation of a cultural bloc. A cultural bloc is the movement of people unified in the establishment of a new social order. Gramsci warns us that capitalist hegemony infects public common sense, which is opinion that is incoherent and ambiguous, but may contain elements of truth. In order to develop a bloc, society needs good sense, which is common sense that belongs to the people with both their passion and experience but imbued with knowledge and reason. It is at this point that we see the importance of organic intellectuals. These are intellectuals who are organically linked to the masses. And with close social and political contact with the people, they have worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thereby helping in the establishment of a cultural and social bloc (Gramsci, 1971 p. 330).

Pre-1800’s there were no unified sense of working-class culture, except within the guild system. In E.P Thompson’s work (1966), the Making of the English Working-class, he traces the self-construction of a working-class consciousness founded on the identification of its class interests and its common enemy. Essentially, the emergence of a working-class culture represented an oppositional movement and the requirement for autonomous education was a strategy to develop an alternative social order. This education was critical, oppositional and counter-hegemonic. It mounted alternatives in philosophy, pedagogy and institutional arrangements. Workers education was meant to be empowering and unifying. Immediate needs and local circumstances were
addressed. Theory was not some remote paradigm. Education was rooted in daily experiences and in the common language.

The process of creating hegemony, regardless of form, requires the same techniques. Persistent efforts are needed to inculcate a conception of reality, with its value systems and practices, into the minds of society. This is the requirement of the articulation of a vision in a common language. Many forms of tactics and activities are employed, such as the spoken or printed word, leisure activities like athletic and singing clubs and even how work relations are organized, in hierarchies or cooperatives. Radical education has always availed of informal settings to ensure that political education remains close to people’s social and cultural activities and also that it is based within the collective. Independent worker education recognizes the importance of creating a distinct physical and social space for the development of self-awareness and cultivation of collective critical consciousness and activity. Culture is a critical site and weapon of power.

Creating a new culture does not only mean one’s own individual “original” discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their “socialisation as it were and even making them the basis of vital action, an element or coordination and intellectual and moral order. For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a “philosophical” event far more important and “original” than the discovery by some philosophical “genius” of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971 p. 324).

A transformative vision is a vision that is created and continuously re-created by conscious human agency rather than a vision created and administered by elites. Preparing for this social change would have a profound effect on the consciousness of the masses. “Popular feeling [would be] standardised and no longer mechanical and casual (that is produced by the conditioning of environmental factors and the like) and become conscious and critical” (ibid p. 429).
Transformative education produces people who are critical, conscious and disciplined. They must be capable of thinking, studying and ruling or controlling those who rule. To be truly human, actively participating in the history of the world requires that all people are philosophers. They must no longer accept passively disseminated views of the world. People must actively be critical and deconstruct their own conceptions, gaining insights into the source of ideas, meanings and values. In this technique of “knowing thyself”, we connect to the historical process – the phases of development of our philosophy and culture. It makes our comprehension coherent and unified, we can distinguish when ideas contradict or intersect with other concepts.

One’s conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and “original” in their immediate relevance. How is it possible to consider the present and quite specific present, with a mode of thought elaborated for a past which is often remote and superseded? When someone does this, it means that he is a walking anachronism, a fossil and not living in the modern world, at the least he is strangely composite.” (Ibid p. 324)

Lessons

The unification of individuals and the exposure to opportunities for social transformation is the work of social movements. As sites for learning and a source of knowledge, social movements engage in critical examination of politics, culture and pedagogy. Radical educators must connect people to their socio-economic experiences by “confronting them with the knowledge that is not only contemplative, but sensual” (McLaren, 2000, p. xi). This provides profound meanings to theories, and practice because it is based in the authenticity of our daily experiences. Radical educators must ensure that education remains in close relations to other activities; it allows the process of becoming conscious to be followed by critical and strategic actions that are oppositional to objectives of the dominant structure.

Historical lessons are meant to provide comprehensive understandings that translate dialectically into the “pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will”. It offers awareness of the construction of hegemony as well as locating historical limitations of counter-hegemonic
activities. Studying social movements allows us to gain insights into tactics and strategies used to maintain supremacy, as well as challenges by groups attempting to construct a new hegemony. The strength of capitalist hegemony is well documented and diverse. It utilises force and consent, influence and suppression, violence and civilization and agitation and propaganda. Counter-hegemonic forces can overcome these obstructions, as well as its own limitations by maintaining praxis, the political activity in the struggle for transformation.

The main limitation of the historical counter-hegemonic forces like socialism has been disorganisation and ideological sectarianism. Ultimately, revolutionary movements need strong leadership that will preserve the organization of the entire social bloc using ideology to cement and unify. Leaders are required to be “constructors, organisers and permanent persuaders in the struggle for democratic ideals” (Gramsci, 1971 p. 10). Leadership that it is able to carefully prepare and construct a collective vision with detailed strategies; is able to respond to economic and social events that demand immediate action and finally to be organically connected to the people, combining effective leadership with mass participation. Gramsci believed that a political party, with a disciplined organizational revolutionary structure is what is required to unite leaders and followers bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Responding to the reality that it is a long march towards social change, Gramsci identifies the strategy he called the “war of positioning”. There are historical times where overt political action becomes ineffective, in many cases because of obstacles created by capitalist hegemony or perhaps the critical consciousness of the people is not awakened. The struggle has not collapsed; strategically it is a time when ideological, cultural and intellectual work must be done. This is the important role that education plays, because a revolution of spirit precedes any political revolution. People must be prepared with a collective critical consciousness which will then facilitate the creation of a new cultural climate.
Transformative or radical education’s goal is the development of the political consciousness and praxis, which is the means for liberating ourselves from the inherent contradictions and exploitation of capitalism. It is the mental liberation from exploitation and oppression, as well as the discipline needed to create a new society that is democratic and just. Praxis is a political activity that empowers people to create history by combining reflection with action. Conscious reflection informed by actual experiences of the political economy will politicise people’s actions and relationship. Gramsci believed that this awareness in combination “pessimism of the intellect, and “optimism of the will” will create an ethical counter-hegemony.

Like all other intellectuals, development education practitioners and theorists need to acknowledge that cultural politics informs our work. Freire reminds us that education is not neutral; we are either teaching for or against a certain perspective. In the course of our political, professional and personal work we need to model the philosophy and cycle of praxis, we must strategise, act and reflect on a continuous basis. Are we engaged in well-meaning activities that are ultimately maintaining the current world view with all its unequal associations or are we actively and collectively engaging in the long march towards a different vision?


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Author Information

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Rhea has twelve years experience in educational work in Ireland which includes development education with the Galway One World Centre and tutoring Communications and Personal Development at YouthReach in Connemara. She has developed and facilitated courses on Policy-Making and Special Needs Education and Disability Awareness. While completing her doctoral research, she also hopes to develop an inter-cultural consultancy venture.
Without signposting in lessons, this is exactly how learners feel. They know that they’re going to ‘practise part two of the IELTS speaking exam’, for example, but they don’t know how they’re going to get there. What is signposting in the English language classroom? Geoff Petty says in Teaching Today: A Practical Guide (2014) that signposting is ‘linking key learning points to specific learning outcomes or transitions between activities’. Basically, you give signs to learners about what they are doing in the lesson and how this relates to the aim of the lesson. Many teachers who I have ob Transformative Education Theory supports the IU Southeast Mission Statement, which states that IU Southeast strives to ‘provide high-quality educational programs and services that promote student learning and prepare students for productive citizenship in a diverse society, and to contribute to the intellectual, cultural, and economic development of the region’ (IUS Strategic Plan). Race-Centric o Focus of the Theory o People of African descent, most often black women, are the subjects of the transformative experience (Taylor, 2008, p. 9) o Emphasizes the social-political dimensions of learning (Taylor, 2008, p. 9) o Approach o Engages