



## ARTICLE

**GRAMSCI, EDUCATOR OF THE POPULAR CLASSES****RENÊ JOSÉ TRENTIN SILVEIRA<sup>1</sup>**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4898-6588>

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this paper is to highlight some of the theoretical aspects of Antonio Gramsci's pedagogical practice in order to contribute to the delineation of his pedagogy. Starting from the analysis of texts written during his youth, some of them not yet published in Brazil, and from the author's letters, we intend to show his radical political commitment to the cultural and critical formation of the popular classes and the ways in which this translated into concrete educational actions. We also try to demonstrate that such commitment was present throughout the author's life, expressed in the several activities he developed: as a journalist, party co-director, founder of schools, elaborator of teaching programs and didactic materials, adult educator, acting in person or at a distance and in different circumstances and spaces, including prison. Obviously, the present work does not exhaust the discussion on the possibility of a Gramscian pedagogy, a topic which, due to its complexity and the vastness of the author's work, remains open.

**Keywords:** Antonio Gramsci, Popular education, Hegemony and education, Marxism and education.

**GRAMSCI, EDUCADOR DAS CAMADAS POPULARES**

**RESUMO:** O objetivo deste artigo é realçar alguns dos aspectos teóricos da prática pedagógica de Antonio Gramsci, a fim de contribuir para o delineamento de sua pedagogia. Partindo sobretudo da análise de textos elaborados na fase da juventude, alguns ainda não publicados no Brasil, e de cartas do autor, pretende-se evidenciar seu radical compromisso político com a formação cultural e crítica das camadas populares e as formas pelas quais ele se traduziu em ações educativas concretas. Busca-se demonstrar, também, que tal compromisso esteve presente ao longo de toda a vida do autor, expressando-se nas diversas atividades que desenvolveu: como jornalista, como co-dirigente partidário, como fundador de escolas, como elaborador de programas de ensino e de materiais didáticos, como educador de adultos, atuando presencialmente ou a distância e em diferentes circunstâncias e espaços, inclusive na prisão. Evidentemente, o presente trabalho não esgota a discussão sobre a possibilidade de uma pedagogia gramsciana, tema que, pela sua complexidade e pela vastidão da obra do autor, permanece em aberto.

**Palavras-chave:** Antonio Gramsci, Educação popular, Hegemonia e educação, Marxismo e educação.

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## GRAMSCI, EDUCADOR DE LAS CAMADAS POPULARES

**RESÚMEN:** El objetivo de este artículo es realzar algunos de los aspectos teóricos de la práctica pedagógica de Antonio Gramsci, con el objetivo de contribuir para el delineamiento de su pedagogía. Partiendo sobre todo del análisis de textos escritos en la fase juvenil y de algunas cartas del autor, se pretende evidenciar su radical compromiso político con la formación cultural y crítica de las camadas populares y las formas por las cuales se tradujo en acciones educativas concretas. Se busca demostrar, también, que tal compromiso estuvo presente a lo largo de toda la vida del autor, expresándose en las diversas actividades que desarrolló: como periodista, codirigente partidario, como fundador de escuelas, como elaborador de planes de enseñanza y de materiales didácticos, como educador de adultos, actuando presencialmente o a distancia y en distintas circunstancias y espacios, incluso en la cárcel. Evidentemente, el presente trabajo no agota la discusión sobre la posibilidad de una pedagogía gramsciana, tema que, por su complejidad y por la vastedad de la obra del autor, permanece en abierto.

**Palabras clave:** Antonio Gramsci, Educación popular, Hegemonía y educación, Marxismo y educación.

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of education, both in the scholastic sense and in the broader sense of cultural and political formation of the working class, occupies a prominent place in Gramsci's concerns.

Throughout his intellectual career, closely intertwined with his political militancy, he forged concepts, didactic principles, and conceptions which gradually, albeit unsystematically, constitute a pedagogy aimed at the critical formation of the popular classes<sup>2</sup>.

Dialectically, such pedagogy results from the concrete challenges posed by his political-pedagogical practice: whether as a journalist, who educates through the articles he writes; as a party and school organizer and co-leader; as a developer of teaching programs and didactic materials; or even as an adult educator with different levels of schooling, acting in person or at a distance and in different circumstances and spaces, including prison.

Obviously, this text does not exhaust the discussion about the possibility of a Gramscian pedagogy, a topic which, due to its complexity and the vastness of the author's work, remains open. The objective proposed here, based especially on the analysis of texts written during his youth, some not yet published in Brazil, and on the author's letters, is to highlight the radical political commitment of Gramsci to the formation of the popular classes, expressed in his educational praxis, and to emphasize some of the theoretical aspects of this praxis that could characterize his pedagogy.

### THE FIRST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Gramsci's interest in education dates back to his early school experiences, as demonstrated by his excellent performance in elementary school, which he completed with top marks in all subjects (D'ORSI, 2018, p. 42). Moreover, very early on he realized the greater importance of this institution for the poor than for the rich. His final paper, dated July 16, 1903, making him 12 at the time, was on the following topic: "If a wealthy and very intelligent classmate of yours revealed to you his intention to abandon his studies, how would you respond to?" (*Idem*). Here is the boy's answer:

You say that you will not resume your studies because you are bored. How can you, who is so intelligent, who, thank God, does not lack what is necessary, abandon your studies? You tell me to do the same, because it is much better to run around in the fields, go to Balls and public meetings, instead of locking yourself for four hours in a room with a teacher who always tells

<sup>2</sup> The notion of "critical formation" or "critical education" in Gramsci requires further discussion. For now, it can be said that it includes the defense of an integral education that balances professional and general education (humanistic, scientific, philosophical, and artistic - the unitary school) and that forms the youth of the popular classes "as a person capable of thinking, of studying, of directing or controlling those who direct" (GRAMSCI, 2006, C 12, §2, p. 49). On the unitary school, see Notebook 12, from the work *Prison Notebooks* (GRAMSCI, 2006).

you to study because otherwise you will remain an empty-head. But I, dear friend, can never abandon my studies because they are my only hope of living honorably when I grow up; because, as you know, my family is neither rich in goods nor in fortune. How many poor boys envy you, they who would want to study, but to whom God has not given what is necessary, either to study, or even at times to feed themselves. I see them from my window, how they, who can only go to night school, stare at the boys who pass by with their bag on their shoulder.

You say that you are rich, that you won't need studies to live, but remember the proverb: "Idleness is the father of all vices. He who does not study in his youth will regret it bitterly in his old age. Go back to your studies, dear Giovanni, and you will find every possible good (D'ORSI, 2018, p. 42-43)<sup>3</sup>

At the age of 11, however, Gramsci was forced to abandon his studies for a certain period of time in order to work and help support his family, which at that time was facing financial difficulties (MAESTRI; CANDREVA, 2001). This fact generated in the boy a feeling of revolt against a situation that seemed unfair to him. After all, why was he, with such good grades, deprived of studying, while the children of the rich continued, regardless of their income? In a letter sent from Vienna, on March 6, 1928, to his wife Giulia, he recalls:

What saved me from becoming a completely starched cloth? The instinct of rebellion, which from boyhood was directed against the rich, because I could not study, I who had gotten an "A" in all the elementary school subjects, while the children of the butcher, the pharmacist, the cloth merchant studied (GRAMSCI, 1994, p. 58)<sup>4</sup>.

This feeling of injustice, experienced first-hand, and the resulting indignation, are at the origin of his later criticism, especially in the Notebooks, of the classist, oligarchic character of the school.

## JOURNALIST-EDUCATOR

Gramsci finished elementary school and high school in Ales, Sardinia, and, thanks to a scholarship, entered the University of Turin in 1911, where he studied Language and Literature. Adapting to this new reality was not easy, both because of the cultural shock experienced by a young man accustomed to a simple life, a recent arrival in a big city, the most industrialized in the country, and because of his precarious subsistence and health conditions. In fact, the aforementioned grant barely covered the rent<sup>5</sup>. Driven in part by these reasons, and also by his political engagement in the Italian Socialist Party (ISP), he abandoned college to dedicate himself more intensely to journalistic militancy, especially after 1915. He then began to contribute to the newspapers *Il Grido del Popolo* (The Cry of the People) and *Avanti!* In 1917, oriented by the *Federazione Giovanile Socialista Italiana* (Italian Socialist Youth Federation), he wrote and published an entire single issue of the newspaper *La Città Futura* (The Future City), especially dedicated to the political and cultural training of young people (MUSSI; BIANCHI, 2017). In 1919, together with his university and militancy colleagues Palmiro Togliatti, Umberto Terracini and Angelo Tasca, he founded the weekly newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* (The New Order), whose subtitle was *Weekly Review of Socialist Culture*. The first issue came out on May 1 with the following slogan printed on the cover: "Educate yourselves because we need your intelligence. Bestir yourselves, because we need your enthusiasm. Get organized, because we need all your strength.

Until his arrest by Mussolini's fascist government in 1926, Gramsci had written about 1,700 articles (MORAES, 2014), on the most varied topics. The motto of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, together with the volume and intensity of his journalistic activity, gives the measure of the importance he attributed to the political and cultural training of the working class, to whom these newspapers were specifically addressed.

<sup>3</sup> Our translation.

<sup>4</sup> Our translation.

<sup>5</sup> See Nosella (2017, p. 14-15) and Gramsci (2005a, p. 190).

But how to speak to the working class in order to achieve this goal? What language and style to adopt? As Paolo Nosella (1992, p. 28) reminds us, this problem was faced by Gramsci when he was still writing for *Il Grido del Popolo*. He refused to oversimplify the language to avoid infantilizing his audience and converting the political discourse into a doctrinal catechism. To do so, he said, "would not be to facilitate; it would be to deceive, like the wine merchant who sells colored water instead of Barolo or Lambrusco" (GRAMSCI *apud* NOSELLA, 1992, p. 28)<sup>6</sup>. For him, socialist periodicals should be adapted "to the average level of the regional clientele to which they are addressed," but should assign to the writing a tone "a little above this average" in order to "stimulate intellectual progress" and the consolidation of a "critical view of history and the world in which they live and struggle" (*Idem*). And he further warned:

The ruling class does the same [...] And should we eternally remain in the Georgics<sup>7</sup>, in wild and bucolic socialism? Should we always, with monotonous insistence, repeat the primer, because there is always someone who does not even know the primer? (GRAMSCI *apud* NOSELLA, 1992, p. 29).

And what to tell the workers? What cultural content to offer them? In a chronicle for *L'Ordine Nuovo* (*The New Order*), August 23, 1919, Gramsci gives us an idea of the kind of formation that the newly created newspaper intended to provide to its public. In this text, he expresses his distrust of the bourgeois school, for failing to teach workers the same body of knowledge to which the economic elites had access. When the workers, in whom the class struggle had forged a "new sense of dignity and freedom", came across "the songs of the poets" or the works of "artists and thinkers", they began to wonder, lamenting: "why didn't the school teach us these things too? After all, they also wanted and had the right to a "complete school" that would put them in contact with "all branches of human knowledge" (GRAMSCI, 1955, p. 119)<sup>8</sup>.

Gramsci knew that, strictly speaking, such a school for the working class would only be feasible in socialism, when it would be a "practical necessity" and, at the same time, an "ideal demand. However, until then, since not much could be expected from the bourgeois-controlled school, it was necessary to accomplish the task of educating the masses "by other means, freely, through spontaneous associations of men animated by the common desire to improve themselves. One asks, then, "why couldn't a newspaper become the center of one of these groups?" If the bourgeois state, concerned only with "accumulating wealth for individuals", had dropped the "torch of science" and the "sacred lamp of life", it would now be up to the coordinators of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, that is, intellectuals committed to the subordinate layers, to lift this torch from the ground and "make it shine with a new light" (GRAMSCI, 1955, p. 119-120)<sup>9</sup>.

One can thus already note, in this journalistic phase, his effective commitment to the intellectual progress of the masses, expressed both in the language chosen to address workers and in the content to be presented to them. He refuses to be satisfied with a light, facilitated, fragmented, partial education for workers. No simplifying, doctrinaire, indoctrinating primers. No colored water, not even cheap wine, but the best: Barolo wine! Culture!<sup>10</sup>

But what does Gramsci mean by culture? In "Socialism and Culture" (GRAMSCI, 2012), published in *Il Grido del Popolo* on January 29, 1916, he criticizes the usual conception that considers it as

<sup>6</sup> Nosella cites the article "Cultura e lotta di classe" (Culture and class struggle), published in *Il Grido del Popolo* on May 25, 1918. Confer Gramsci (2012, p. 269-272).

<sup>7</sup> According to Pio (2017, p. 137), "*The Georgics* (37-30 BC) is a poem [by Virgil] about rural life and various agricultural activities."

<sup>8</sup> Our translation.

<sup>9</sup> A short time later, still in 1919, in an article entitled "Is the school a serious institution?", published in *Avanti!*, Gramsci will emphatically defend the school and claim to do so in the name of the working class (GRAMSCI, 1968, p. 101).

<sup>10</sup> Barolo, produced in the Piedmont region, is among the best wines in Italy and in the world. Gramsci's choice of this wine for his metaphor cannot, therefore, have been random. Rather, it suggests that the political struggle for the emancipation of the subordinate culture presupposes ensuring them an integral education, with access to the most elaborate, erudite culture, which enables them not only to understand society and its workings scientifically and critically, but also to "think," "study," "direct" and "control those who direct" (GRAMSCI, 2006, C 12, §2, p. 49).

"encyclopedic knowledge", according to which the human being would be like a container to be filled with raw, disconnected information that he must "box in his brain", to be resorted to when necessary. For him, this notion of culture is harmful to the proletariat because it serves to "create displaced people", who consider themselves superior to the rest of humanity only because they have accumulated a certain amount of data in their memory and who make this a barrier between them and others (*Idem*, 2016, p. 105). He states:

"The little student who knows a bit of Latin and history, the little lawyer who has managed to get a crummy degree due to the indolence and complacency of the teachers, will consider themselves different and superior even to 'the best specialized worker who performs in life a far more thorough and indispensable task and who, in his activity, is worth a hundred times more than those other two are worth in theirs' (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 143).

This "colorless, pedantic intellectualism" is in reality neither culture nor intelligence, but "pedantry", against which one must react. And what, then, would culture be?

It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, it is the taking possession of one's personality, it is the conquest of a higher consciousness, through which one is able to understand one's own historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and duties (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 143-144).

However, this is not something that occurs by "spontaneous evolution," nor by force of some fatalism or from one hour to another. Rather, it presupposes an intentional, planned, and long-term educational action, which enables an "intelligent reflection" on the why of certain facts and on the means to convert them into a symbol of rebellion. Indeed, says Gramsci (2012, p. 144), "every revolution was preceded by intense work of critique, of cultural penetration" that prepared the ground for the structural transformations that followed. This was the case, for example, of the French Revolution, whose way was paved by the Enlightenment:

The bayonets of Napoleon's armies found the path already flattened by an invisible army of books, of booklets, which had been disseminated from Paris since the first half of the eighteenth century and which had prepared men and institutions for the necessary renewal (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 144).<sup>11</sup>

What was true, then, for the French Revolution is also true for socialism. There needs to be a broad, continuous educational work at the base, which paves the way for social transformation, at the same time that the political organization of the masses advances. We seem to be facing the gestation process of the theory of hegemony and the conception of education as an instrument for its construction in favor of the popular classes.

This educational work and the intelligent reflection it propitiates allow us to undertake the critique of capitalist civilization and reach a "unitary consciousness of the proletariat". This is the new meaning attributed by Gramsci to the Socratic adage "know thyself", meaning "to be oneself", "to be master of oneself", to differentiate oneself, "to distinguish oneself", to leave "chaos", "to be an element of order, but of one's own order, one's own discipline" (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 145). And this presupposes, also, knowledge of others - for example, the bourgeoisie - and their history, in the course of which these others became what they are and created the civilization that the proletariat now wishes to replace. It also presupposes knowing the laws of nature and of the spirit and "learning everything without losing sight of the ultimate aim, which is to know oneself better through others and others through oneself" (*Ibidem.*, p. 146).

Culture, therefore, if it is not ornamental knowledge, it is not the absence of knowledge either! According to Manacorda (1990, p. 22-23), in the text *Socialism and Culture*, Gramsci criticizes and seeks to overcome two opposing tendencies of his time: on the one hand, the "encyclopedic and

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<sup>11</sup> Original translation from the Italian by Regina Célia da Silva, from the Center for Language Studies (CEL), University of Campinas (Unicamp).

paternalistic conception of knowledge as a solid set of notions to be benevolently transmitted" and, on the other hand, the "contempt for culture in the name of fact, the underestimation of the theoretical aspect in the name of the practical aspect. In place of these extremes, he proposes "action that is cultural" and "culture that is active. In short, culture as praxis.

This notion of culture also leads him to reject "any form of popular instruction squashed by cultural welfarism" (NOSELLA, 1992, p. 21), as we can observe in his criticism of the Popular University of Turin.

Popular universities were intended for a specific public: adults who were unable to pursue their studies in regular schools and at the conventional age. There was one such institution in Turin, which Gramsci analyzes in the article "The Popular University," published in *Avanti!* on December 29, 1916 (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 176-179)<sup>12</sup>. According to him, the directors of this institution were not concerned with seeking the best way to bring students closer to the "world of knowledge." Instead, they treated them as if they were the same age and had the same education as regular students in public universities and, therefore, offered them something "similar" but "inferior. This turned the People's University into a kind of "renewal of the Jesuit school, in which knowledge was presented as something definitive, apodictically indisputable." Now this, says Gramsci, "is not done even in public universities" (*Ibidem*, pp. 177-178).

There was, therefore, a serious administrative and methodological problem, which turned this university into a "cold flame" and made it "neither university nor popular" (*Ibidem*, p. 177). What drove its directors was a "light and inexpressive spirit of beneficence", that is, an inspiration of assistance, philanthropy, populism, and not a "lively and fruitful desire to contribute to the spiritual elevation of the multitude through teaching" (*Ibidem*). Following the example of charities, they distributed "baskets of supplies that fill the stomach," which might even "cause indigestion," but "do not leave a mark, do not have a continuity of new life, of a different life" (*Idem*). In short, they did not transform the lives of the beneficiaries.

To this "watertight encyclopedic method", Gramsci counterposes, according to Nosella (1992, p. 22), the "historicist method", which consists of retracing, with and for the students, the path taken by humanity to reach knowledge with its "efforts", its "mistakes" and its "victories". After all, "a truth is fruitful only when there has been an effort to conquer it. It "does not exist in and of itself," but is a "conquest of the spirit" (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 178)<sup>13</sup>.

It is necessary, therefore, to reproduce in the students "that state of anxiety that the scholar went through" and that led him to reach the truth he sought (*Idem*). Hence the importance of the teacher also teaching the "history of his subject" (*Idem*). After all, allowing students to retrace the path that leads to knowledge is something "far more educational than the schematic exposition of that same knowledge." This is because:

It forms the scholar, gives his spirit the elasticity of methodical doubt, which makes a serious man of the amateur, which purifies curiosity, commonly understood, and makes it a healthy and fruitful stimulus for ever greater and perfect knowledge (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 178).

This is the path that teachers must take, especially with students at popular universities, who rightly lack even the most elementary contact with research. Practiced in this way, Gramsci concludes, teaching becomes, in fact, "an act of liberation" (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 178).

## **EDUCATOR – FACE-TO-FACE AND DISTANCE – OF YOUTH AND ADULTS WITHIN THE PARTY**

For Gramsci, the revolutionary political party, authentically committed to the emancipation of the subordinate classes, must also act in their cultural formation. This action must be directed, in the first place, to its own cadres, both the leaders and the other militants.

<sup>12</sup> Translation by Regina Célia da Silva (CEL/Unicamp).

<sup>13</sup> In *Notebook 12*, he will say: "to discover a truth by oneself, without outside suggestions and aids, is creation, even if the truth is old, and demonstrates possession of the method; it indicates that, in any case, one has entered the stage of intellectual maturity, in which one can discover new truths" (GRAMSCI, 2006, v. 2, C 12, §1, p. 40).

With this objective, he and his comrades from *L'Ordine Nuovo* created in 1919 the School of Culture and Socialist Propaganda, aimed at the Party's internal public. The school's program was first published in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, on November 29 of that year, under the title "*Il programma della scuola di propaganda*" ("*The propaganda school program*"). It was divided into four thematic axes, with the following subjects and their respective teachers:

#### 1. - THEORETICAL LINES

1. - Economic determinism and historical materialism (Z. Zini)
2. - Syndicalism and labor movement theory (A. Gramsci)
3. - Anarchy and the theory of the state (A. Tasca)
4. - Economy and Socialism (P. Togliatti)

#### 2. - HISTORICAL REFERENCES

1. - Origin and development of capitalism (P. Togliatti)
2. - The French revolution (U. Terracini)
3. - The Communist Manifesto (Z. Zini)
4. - Forms and development of the labor movement (G. Balsamo-Crivelli)
5. - From the First to the Third International (A. Tasca)
6. - The Russian revolution (A. Gramsci)

#### 3. - THE STATE OF THE COUNCILS

1. - The factory council (U. Terracini)
2. - Trade unions and soviets (A. Gramsci)
3. - The economic councils (P. Togliatti)
4. - The soldiers' councils (A. Tasca)
5. - Peasants' councils (A. Tasca)
6. - The dictatorship of the proletariat (A. Gramsci)

#### 4. - PROBLEMS AND POLEMICS

1. - The Nation and the International (A. Tasca)
2. - Religion (A. Gramsci)
3. - Cooperation (U. Terracini)
4. - The municipality (G. Casalini, O. Pastore)
5. - The school (P. Togliatti)
6. - The family and the communist custom (A. Tasca)
7. - The place of art in the new regime (G. Balsamo-Crivelli)
8. - Justice (Z. Zini) (GRAMSCI, 1919c, p. 4, emphasis in the original).

As we can see, Gramsci was active not only in designing and directing the course, but also as a teacher. As for the teaching methodology, it was recommended that each subject should be "treated in a didactic way, trying to fix the attention of the students on some concepts and on the logical nexus of reasoning". To assist in this work, handouts were to be prepared with a "schematic summary of each lesson, containing no more than four printed pages" (GRAMSCI, 1919c, p. 4). For those who were more interested and had more time available, a complementary bibliography would be recommended to deepen the study of specific themes.

The program also foresaw that the students would practice the discussion of subjects previously agreed upon with the teacher. All, however, had to demonstrate that they had studied the general themes, which included, for example, the "Communist Manifesto" by Marx and Engels, whose fundamental concepts they were expected to be able to "explain clearly", and Trotsky's booklet: "From the October Revolution to the Brest-Litowski Peace", "which effectively presents the historical process of the Russian revolution, the path followed by the proletarian forces to achieve the effective conquest of political power" (GRAMSCI, 1919c, p. 4). This program could be modified according to the needs and complemented with lectures by comrades who were not on the list of teachers.

Finally, the school directors intended to provide, not only to the students, but also to the other comrades, "a practical guide for the formation and integration of their culture". To this end, lists of books would be drawn up, "grouped according to subjects and the greater or lesser difficulty," which would form or complete the libraries of the Workers' Educational Circles (GRAMSCI, 1919c, p. 4).

In the week following the beginning of the school, with the first classes having been held, Gramsci had already registered, in a chronicle in *L'Ordine Nuovo* (GRAMSCI, 1919a, p. 1), to his own surprise, his

satisfaction with the good results obtained. Surprised because, at first, some doubted that, meeting only "once or twice a week" and "tired from their own work", the students would be excited to study (*Idem*). However, what they saw was something else: "crowded together, squeezed together, on uncomfortable benches and in a cramped space, those unusual students," most of them "no longer young and therefore beyond the age when learning is something simple and natural," and still "fatigued by the working day in the workshop or office", yet following the classes attentively. This shows that, between educators and students, "a lively chain of intelligence and sympathy has been established"<sup>14</sup>. In short, they were students "with the will to become better", "to acquire awareness", to "become capable" of thinking and owners of their own thought and action, "direct authors of the history of their own class (*Idem*).

In a second chronicle, from December 27 of that same year (GRAMSCI, 1919b, p. 1), Gramsci gives more details of the school's success. He states, for example, that after the "national publicity" it had received from *L'Avanguardia* (The Vanguard) (*Idem*, 1919d, p. 4), the management began to receive numerous letters from comrades who lived far from Turin, "young people and workers", lamenting that they could not attend the classes and requesting that they be sent the course books and lists of recommended books. In turn, the directors felt "morally obliged to attend to them", which they intended to do by publishing the school's material in *L'Ordine Nuovo* itself, together with a schematic summary of the concepts presented in the theoretical classes (*Idem*, 1919b, p. 1). Thus, for the students, this material would be "a study guide" and "a roadmap to review and synthetically resume the path taken". For those far away, it would be "a test", an "incentive to emulate", so that they would try to do the same, even at a distance.

The sense of moral obligation to meet the request of the comrades who could not attend school in person shows the pedagogical and political commitment of Gramsci and his colleagues at *L'Ordine Nuovo* to the training of all workers.

Regarding the students' performance in the courses, the majority demonstrated "wanting to work seriously. The teachers read and discussed the students' writings, and "not a few of them" were "remarkable for the precision of their thought and expression," even in "oral presentations and specific questions" (GRAMSCI, 1919b, p. 1)<sup>15</sup>. This gives us an idea of the pedagogical activities developed: theoretical classes, probably expositive, oral discussions, production of texts, synthesizing concepts and debates, careful reading of the students' production for evaluation purposes.

A few years later, in an editorial in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, April 1, 1925, entitled "The Party School," Gramsci (1973, p. 114) would recall "the success and the positive repercussion" of this school, although he recognized that they were less than expected and that their duration had been short: in fact, "not even the time necessary to develop the program outlined in the beginning" (*Idem*).<sup>16</sup>

Under fascism, with the curtailment of freedom of speech and assembly and the advance of repression, the party school could no longer exist as before. Gramsci himself gives us an overview of that "white terror" situation:

The most active workers are persecuted, they are controlled in all their movements, in all their reading; workers' libraries have been burned down or dismantled; the great organizations and the great mass actions no longer exist and cannot act. The militants do not participate at all, or participate only to a very limited extent, in the discussions and debate of ideas (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 51).

Now it was necessary to look for other ways to train their own cadres. One of the alternatives found was distance education, by correspondence. Gramsci refers to this experience in the article "The *L'Ordine Nuovo* Program"<sup>17</sup>, published in the same newspaper on April 1, 1924. The course then conceived was to become "the first phase of a movement for the creation of small party schools", aimed at preparing "Bolshevist organizers and propagandists, not maximalists who have, therefore, brains as well as lungs and throat" (GRAMSCI, 1973, p. 75).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On the Gramscian conception of the teacher-student relationship, see Silveira (2018).

<sup>15</sup> Our translation.

<sup>16</sup> On this subject, see also Nosella (1992, p. 56-57).

<sup>17</sup> Manacorda (1990, p. 42) mentions this school, as well as the previous one.

<sup>18</sup> Our translation.



For Gramsci, Maximalists were those who, even within the Communist Party, incorporated a "fatalistic and mechanistic conception of Marx's doctrine" (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 544) and for whom the final victory of the proletariat would be inevitable, the fruit of historical movement conceived abstractly and mechanically<sup>19</sup>. Gramsci counterposed to this metaphysical fatalism the dialectical method he had learned from Lenin:

Comrade Lenin taught us that in order to defeat our class enemy, who is powerful, who has many means and reserves at his disposal, we must exploit every crack in his front and we must use every possible ally, even if uncertain, oscillating and provisional. He taught us that, in a war of armies, one cannot achieve the strategic end, which is the destruction of the enemy and the occupation of his territory, without having first achieved a series of tactical objectives aimed at disintegrating the enemy before facing him in the open field (GRAMSCI, 2012, p. 544-545).<sup>20</sup>

Now, one of these tactical objectives is certainly the cultural and political formation of the workers, by all possible means, school or not. In the process of this formation, a first aspect to be considered is precisely the combat against the fatalistic conception of history. This is what it means to also have a head and not just lungs and throat. In other words, it means action mediated by reflection and not immobility camouflaged by an "ultra-leftist phraseology" (COUTINHO, 2007, p. 56), by a pamphlet-like psittacism, repeater of slogans, ideas and slogans that are mechanically and superficially captured, at the level of common sense, and that contribute little or nothing to the formation of the masses.

To promote this formation, the party leaders, that is, those who will act as educators of others, should always keep in touch with their comrades, even if by "epistolary correspondence" (GRAMSCI, 1973, p. 75)<sup>21</sup>. Hence, "Wherever a group of ten comrades exists abroad, a party school must arise," in which the "older and more experienced members must be the instructors," in order to "share their experience with the younger ones" and thus "contribute to raising the political level of the masses" (*Idem*).

Of course, Gramsci (1973, p. 75) was clear that "it is not with these pedagogical means that the great historical problem of the spiritual emancipation of the working class will be solved. In fact, it was not the "utopian resolution of this problem" that the *L'Ordine Nuovo* group was proposing. The limits and scope of the school were fully recognized: it was intended for "the Party," made up of people who, by the mere fact of having joined it, already demonstrated that they had acquired a "remarkable degree of spiritual emancipation. Therefore, the objective was the improvement of its cadres with the purpose of "making them able to face the next struggles" (*Idem*). In short, it was about "forming fellow workers, capable of practical work and not just shouting 'Long live the revolution'" (*Ibidem*, p. 76).

Nosella (1992) mentions three other texts by Gramsci, from 1925, important for knowledge of this correspondence school. They are: "The party school", published in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, on April 1 (GRAMSCI, 1973, p. 114-116); "Introduction to the first course of the internal party school" (*Idem*, 1978, p. 50-57); and "The life of the school" (*Idem*, p. 58-62). The last two also correspond to the introduction of the only two handbooks of this school, both prepared by Gramsci.

In carrying out his political-educational project, Gramsci knows that it would be utopian to expect the entire mass of workers and peasants to be fully aware of the social and world role of their class. But he believes that this should be expected at least from party members (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 54). He also knows that it would not be possible to change the consciousness of the whole working class before the change in the way of life of this class, that is, without it having under its control 'the apparatus of production and commerce and the state power' (*Idem*). Thus, any risk of attributing to him an idealistic reading of the role of education in the construction of socialism is removed, which, on the other hand, does not imply, obviously, neglecting the political struggle in the ideological field. Quite the contrary, for him it is necessary that the party "intensify and make systematic its activity" in this field (*Ibidem*, p. 55).

<sup>19</sup> Gramscian criticism of maximalism is directed particularly at the communist leader Amadeo Bordiga (COUTINHO, 2007, p. 35).

<sup>20</sup> This understanding will later help him elaborate the concept of position warfare.

<sup>21</sup> The demand for permanent contact of intellectuals and the philosophy of praxis with the masses and the "simple" will also be emphasized in the *Notebooks*. See, for example, Gramsci (2001, v. 1, C 10, §44, p. 398; C 11, §12, p. 103; §67, p. 221222).

Therefore, the importance of the militants' training is justified, since the party needs to live and be in contact with its bases and, for that, "it is necessary that each member of the party be an active political element, be a leader" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 56). In other words, the party must educate its members and "raise their ideological level" to the point that, in the eventual absence of the leaders (for example, due to the consequences of an authoritarian regime),

all party members, each one in his or her own environment, are in a position to orientate themselves, to know how to extract from reality the elements to establish a direction, so that the working class does not fall, but feels guided and still in a position to fight (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 56).

There is undoubtedly a concern here to educate for autonomy, including within the party. To achieve this goal, the correspondence school program involved three blocks of lessons: the first on the "theory of historical materialism"; the second, on "the fundamental elements of general politics"; and the third, on "the Communist Party and the organizational principles that are proper to it" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 56).

For the first block, Bukharin's book on historical materialism was recommended<sup>22</sup>. The second included the following topics:

political economy; the development of capitalism up to the epoch of finance capitalism; war and the crisis of capitalism; the development of economic forms; communist society and the transitional regime; the communist doctrine of the State; the I and II International; the III International; the history of the Russian Bolshevik Party; the history of the Italian Communist Party; Soviet power and the structure of the Soviet Republic; the economic policy of Soviet power in the epoch of war communism; origin and basis of the new economic policy; industry; agrarian and peasant policy; trade and cooperation; financial policy; trade unions, their functions and tasks; the national question (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 56).

Finally, the third block was to study "systematically the doctrine of the Party and the principles of revolutionary organization," according to what was established by the Communist International (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 56-57).

To support the pedagogical work, monthly handouts were to be published, dealing with these various subjects, which were to be studied, and not just read "as one reads a newspaper or a pamphlet" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 57). Gramsci adds: "The students should study as if they had to pass an end-of-course exam, that is, they should make an effort to remember, to assimilate the subjects treated, so as to be able to make relations and small presentations" (*Idem*).

The "average preparation of the masses of the Party" was to be taken into account in the devising of the workbooks. It could be that for some the subjects were already known, while for others they were a "novelty somewhat difficult to digest. And, to a certain extent, this was inevitable. But in this case, the students should help each other, since "the formation of groups and the common repetition of the lessons received can sometimes remove this obstacle". Moreover, it was recommended that they should write to the school management, if necessary, presenting their difficulties, "requesting further clarifications and suggesting other methods and other forms of presenting" the content (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 57).

At the end of the first block, Gramsci analyzes the evaluations and comments that reached the party leadership. In relation to the Workbooks, the main observation concerned the "somewhat clipped and absolute" form of presenting the content, with "very numerous and vast" subjects, so that it would be necessary to devise "a more restricted general plan" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 58).

Moreover, considering the students' lack of preparation, there was the risk that the textbooks would be taken as "pure gold", that is, "indisputable truth", and they would end up mechanically memorizing what should instead be "the object of discussion and examination" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 58). Gramsci recognizes this risk and is aware that the best type of school is the face-to-face, "talking" school, not the correspondence school:

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<sup>22</sup> This is the *Essay on Popular Sociology*, which, as Nosella (1992, p. 61) points out, Gramsci will criticize later, in *Notebook 11* (GRAMSCI, 2001, C 11, §13, p. 114).

In the spoken school, the teacher has before him the students, gathered in one place: he knows or comes to know them all individually; he can evaluate the capacities and limitations of each one and can work out a method and form of presentation best suited to develop the capacities and overcome the limitations; he can, from time to time, correct false interpretations, clarify misunderstandings, obscurities, insist on less obvious and more complex notions, try, in short, to make the school live collectively in such a way that there is a continuous development of individuals and that this development is organic and systematic (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 58).

Evidently, distance learning did not offer these conditions. The students who studied from textbooks were "many hundreds" and "very diverse. Among them were: "old and young"; "workers from the big city [...], where the development of capitalism gave rise to the economic forms and phenomena that are studied on the courses"; workers from small towns; "poor peasants", "employees, students, etc." (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 59). In short, there were people

more or less accustomed to reflection, more or less patient in the face of difficulties, with more or less lived life experience, more or less capable, therefore, of relating a scientific notion to the real and concrete facts that illuminate it and allow one to understand its scope and meaning (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 58-59).

Despite this great diversity, "the lessons should be the same for everyone, necessarily" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 59), because everyone needed to be educated. And since it would not be possible to offer a specific course for each of these groups, the solution was to organize the lessons and the texts, taking into account the "average type of student" who, however, "in reality, exists only as an abstraction". Hence, it was inevitable that the lessons and handouts should end up having a "somewhat absolute and abstract, somewhat mechanical" character, which is certainly neither ideal nor adequate for an "organic proletarian school" (*Idem*).

However, the intention was hardly to "create a model school, according to the principles of pedagogy and didactics," but rather "a school under existing conditions," which were "very difficult and arduous to overcome. Besides, no school, however perfect, is sufficient to "educate and form the individual", because "each one educates and forms himself mainly by himself". The school can "accelerate this formation", "teach how to study, accustom one to an intellectual discipline", but "cannot replace the spirit of initiative in the field of knowledge" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 59).

Moreover, it was necessary to consider that the working class, "exploited and oppressed" materially, was also "systematically deprived of scientific knowledge." For this class, the bourgeois State organized a type of professional school, which aims to "maintain the division of classes, to ensure that the son of the worker is also a worker". Now, given this class organization of the school, which always keeps the worker distant from science, the tendency is that he never values his own knowledge, but, on the contrary, is led to underestimate himself. In fact,

the worker always believes that he is more ignorant and more incapable than he really is; the worker always experiences a great hesitation in expressing his opinion, because he is persuaded that his opinion is worth little, because he has been accustomed to thinking that his function in life is not to produce ideas, to give direction, to have an opinion, but rather to follow the ideas of others, to carry out the direction of others and to listen with open mouth to the opinions of others (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 60).

Consequently, there is no reason to be so concerned about the risk that students will mechanically memorize the content of the textbooks, or even that they will be proud of having achieved this feat, since this can somehow help to raise their self-confidence and self-esteem. However, it is certainly a risk to be "systematically combated" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 60).

Over time, the system of contact with students only by correspondence proved to be insufficient. The school had grown and already had more than 600 students, and it was impossible to respond to everyone. The solution was to create a group of party instructors (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 61), who would be chosen by the students themselves in each locality, according to the following criteria: "good will", "party seniority" and "relatively greater preparation, etc." (*Idem*). It would be up to these instructors to "garner the wishes of the students, to respond themselves to the most elementary

observations" and "transmit the rest to the school management, thus serving as a link between the center and the masses" (*Idem*). In addition, they should act as "school assistants": studying the lessons "not only for themselves, but also for the group to which they belong" in order to be able to explain the subjects to others (*Idem*).

The topics covered should also undergo adaptations, focusing more directly on the reality of each group. Thus, "each lesson should aim at a practical explanation of the phenomena present in the experience of the comrades, whether in the economic field, or in the political and ideological field" (GRAMSCI, 1978, p. 61). It was also expected that among the instructors there would emerge leaders capable of "translating the Party's slogans into language understandable to the local masses" (*Idem*).

## EDUCATOR IN PRISON

On November 8, 1926, despite his parliamentary immunity, Gramsci was arrested by the fascist regime. After a few days of confinement in the Roman prison of *Regina Coeli*, together with other communist deputies, he was taken to the island of *Ustica*, where he would remain for about two months, until he was transferred, on January 4, 1927, to *San Vitore* prison in Milan.

In *Ustica*, along with other prisoners, Gramsci organized a school that was at the same time elementary, literacy, middle, and high school. This is what he wrote to his friend Piero Sraffa<sup>23</sup> in a letter dated December 21, 1926

In Ustica, there are thirty of us political prisoners: we have already begun a whole series of courses, basic and general culture, for the various groups of prisoners<sup>24</sup>; we will also begin a series of lectures. Bordiga is in charge of the scientific part, I am in charge of the historical-literary part; this is why I have ordered certain books. We hope in this way to pass the time without getting bored, being useful to the other friends, who represent the whole range of parties and cultural preparation. [...] There are three or four who are illiterate, or almost; the rest have a varied preparation, but a very low average. But everyone is happy to have the school, which is attended with great assiduity and application (GRAMSCI, 2005a, p. 92-93).

In another letter, dated January 2, 1927, he gives his friend more details about the school:

We have already started a school, divided into several courses: 1st course (1st and 2nd primary grades), 2nd course (3rd primary grade), 3rd course (4th and 5th primary grades), complementary course, two French courses (basic and advanced), a German course. The courses are set up according to knowledge in subjects that can be reduced to a certain set of exactly determinable notions (grammar and mathematics); that is why students in the primary courses take the history and geography lessons in the complementary course, for example. In short, we have tried to combine the need for a school seriation with the fact that the students, although sometimes semi-literate, are intellectually developed. The courses are followed with great care and attention. With this school, which is also attended by some employees and residents of the island, we avoid the dangers of discouragement, which are immense. You cannot even imagine the conditions of physical and moral brutalization to which the common prisoners have been reduced (GRAMSCI, 2005a, p. 99-100).

Writing to his sister-in-law Tatiana on January 3, 1927, Gramsci tells her that he was in charge of teaching history and geography and that he attended the German course. He was, therefore, a teacher and student in the prisoners' "school of general culture" (GRAMSCI, 2005a, p. 102).

Transferred to the Milan prison, Gramsci was forced to interrupt this teaching and student activity. However, the school of culture continued to function in *Ústica* and he began to guide the

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<sup>23</sup> Piero Sraffa (1898-1983) was a prestigious socialist economist, contributor to *L'Ordine Nuovo*, and member of the Italian Communist Party. He corresponded regularly with Gramsci by letter from the beginning of his imprisonment, communicating news of his family, especially his wife Giulia, who had returned to Russia with the couple's two children, and fulfilling the function of emissary of the PCI. Being from a wealthy and influential family, Sraffa was able to open an account for Gramsci at the *Sperling & Kupfer* bookstore in Milan, from where he sent him the books requested by his imprisoned friend (HENRIQUES, 2005, p. 68-69).

<sup>24</sup> According to Henriques (2005, p. 101, note 2), "ordinary prisoners were not allowed to attend the courses or have any other contact with the political inmates."

comrades who remained there by correspondence<sup>25</sup>. This was the case with Giuseppe Berti, for example, to whom he wrote on July 4, 1927. Despite finding himself in a moment of extreme "moral fatigue" caused by family events, "very nervous and irascible" and with difficulty in concentrating on any subject, he did not shy away from answering the former fellow prisoner who had asked him for advice and "'brilliant' ideas" about the conduct of school activities. His answer:

In my view, one of the most important activities to be carried out by the teaching staff would be to record, develop and coordinate pedagogical and didactic experiences and observations; only from this continuous work can the kind of school and the kind of teacher that the environment requires be born. What a beautiful book could be written about these experiences, and how useful it would be! (GRAMSCI, 2005a, p. 167)

As for brilliant ideas, to the disappointment of the addressee, he replies: "I think that brilliance should be 'buried' and, on the contrary, the method of the most thorough experiments and the most dispassionate or objective self-criticism should be applied" (GRAMSCI, 2005a, p. 167). He therefore refuses to give recipes and instead invites critical reflection on pedagogical practice. However, he does not fail to give his colleague moral encouragement, expressing confidence in his ability to face difficulties. Regarding the organization of the school, he recommends Berti:

So, in summary, I think that the school should have three grades (fundamental, because each grade could be divided into courses): the third grade should be that of the teachers or equivalents and function more as a circle than as a school in the common sense. That is, each component should make its contribution as a lecturer or reporter on certain scientific, historical, or philosophical, but especially didactic and pedagogical subjects (GRAMSCI, 2005a, p. 167).

We can clearly see Gramsci's concern with the training, especially didactic and pedagogical, of teachers and how it should be carried out: through collective, shared, interdisciplinary study, aiming at the expansion of everyone's knowledge in the area of each one's domain.<sup>26</sup>

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many other texts by Gramsci would need to be studied to accurately characterize his pedagogical practice and identify the principles and theoretical assumptions on which it is based. I believe, however, that the road traveled so far was sufficient to demonstrate his radical commitment to the formation of the popular classes, aiming at their intellectual and moral empowerment to critically understand the reality in which they live and act autonomously to transform it. It is now worthwhile to synthetically resume some of the aspects of this practice, extracted from the sources examined here, which could be constitutive of his pedagogy.

At the outset, it is important to highlight his recognition of the importance of school for the working class, despite the discriminatory character of this institution in capitalist society. Without it, however, this class would be at an even greater disadvantage in relation to the bourgeoisie. Hence the need to demand that schools be serious and capable of teaching workers the knowledge that has been the privilege of the economic elites.

But an education for the masses cannot neglect the language used in the teaching process, which must avoid the extremes of pedantic academicism and populist facilitation. Both prevent simple people from having access to knowledge: the first, by making it hermetic and incomprehensible; the second, by impoverishing it, turning it into a pamphlet discourse, a doctrinal catechism. We must adapt it, therefore, to the average level of the students, but raising it a little above this average, in order to enable the intellectual and cultural growth of all. And this applies as much to the oral language, adopted in classes and lectures, as it does to the written language of the selected texts and didactic materials.

The same methodological principle of cultural elevation of the masses applies to the selection of content. Gramsci aims at an integral, omnilateral education for workers, one that covers all fields of

<sup>25</sup> On this subject, see also Nosella (1992, p. 71).

<sup>26</sup> This recommendation of collective work brings us back to the proposal of crop circles that will be presented in the *Notebooks*. See Gramsci (2006, C12, §1, p. 35).

knowledge and breaks with the bourgeois tradition of reserving vocational education or a light, insipid, insignificant, and harmless school education for them. Even out-of-school education, carried out in and by the party, must follow this principle. Otherwise, students cannot become autonomous persons, capable of "thinking, studying, directing or controlling those who direct" (GRAMSCI, 2006, C 12, §2, p. 49). It is, in fact, a radically democratic conception of education, as it aims "to transform every 'citizen' into a 'ruler' [ensuring] the free learning of the skills and the general technical preparation necessary for this purpose" (GRAMSCI, 2006, C 12, §2, p. 50).

However, it is not about culture in the encyclopedic sense, typical of the banking pedagogical practice, described and criticized by Paulo Freire, which serves more to create arrogant, pedant people and discriminate even more against simple ones. Culture, for Gramsci, means knowing oneself, recognizing one's own historical and social value and one's own rights and duties; being able to reflect intelligently on concrete problems; having class consciousness. It also means critically devising one's own conception of the world, acting as the subject of history; guiding oneself and no longer passively accepting external influences on one's way of thinking, acting, and feeling.

The acquisition of this culture does not occur spontaneously, but rather requires an intentional educational action, a task that is incumbent on intellectuals and, in particular, on educators, whether they act in school or in any other educational spaces. It also requires adequate teaching methods, which specifically favor this cultural formation. Now, in order to be efficient, every method needs to start from the real conditions in which it operates, taking into account the specificities of the target public. And, in the case of an education aimed at the popular classes which, as a rule, are less familiar with the so-called "school culture", care must be taken to ensure that the content is approached didactically. This implies, among other measures presenting it clearly and in adequate language, as has already been pointed out; linking it to the students' experience, so that they gain concrete meaning for it, motivating them to study and participate in class; pointing out, for each subject, the main topics and those that deserve more attention; explaining the reasoning developed by the authors of the texts used, so that the students learn to recognize their logical connections and improve their own capacity to think and express themselves orally and in writing; present a short summary of each lesson that synthesizes these topics; recommend a complementary bibliography for those who wish and are able to deepen their study; promote discussion by the whole group, in an atmosphere of freedom and respect, about the issues raised; ask the students to explain the topics studied orally and in writing; propose exercises that allow them to develop their own understanding of these topics; carefully evaluate learning.

It is also worth mentioning the importance Gramsci gives to collective work, through which the more advanced students help those who have more difficulties, so that everyone learns and is culturally enriched by one another. In addition to the pedagogical benefits, the experience of mutual cooperation provided by this methodological strategy can: strengthen the affective and companionship bonds between colleagues, which is also fundamental for their organization as a class; stimulate the emergence of leaderships naturally legitimized by the group; and also help overcome problems of inhibition and low self-esteem.

Still on the methodological issue, Gramsci recommends the adoption of the historicist method which, rather than dogmatically exposing the content, retraces with the students the path of the researcher being studied, showing their mistakes and successes, so that they can appropriate not only the result of the research, but also the method used in it.

As for the teaching material, it must also be adapted to the students' reality, which applies to the language used, the length of the texts, and the degree of complexity of the subjects included. And making this adaptation is the educator's responsibility, even if they have to devise and re-devise this material.

It is also important that teachers record and evaluate their practice dispassionately and continuously and are willing to change it according to the needs detected. Basically, this willingness to self-criticize and to change course results from the recognition that the teaching plan is subordinated to objective conditions, and not the other way around, otherwise, if it is guided by an idealistic conception, the risks of failure will increase considerably.

Regarding distance education, perhaps we can learn from Gramsci to dimension its value in a more balanced way and see it as an exceptional or complementary alternative, which cannot replace the

living experience of direct teacher-student contact, but which, under particular circumstances, cannot be discarded either. In this sense, the advent of the Internet and the development of sophisticated educational platforms represent a gigantic potential to be critically and creatively explored in mass education. Giving up this resource a priori could be a political mistake of significant consequences.

Finally, it is important to mention an aspect that cuts across all of the above, and indeed Gramsci's entire life: his radical ethical and political commitment to education, especially that of the working classes. Marx (1991, p. 117) had stated: "The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses". Now, perhaps no other Marxist thinker and militant has so organically incorporated these words and managed to translate them into a pedagogical action so fully and continuously assumed. And this in spite of all the enormous adversities he had to face throughout his life: chronic fragile health, precarious economic conditions, political persecution, illegality, arbitrary imprisonment, physical and moral violence, separation from family and friends, deprivation of the minimum conditions of dignity. None of this, however, shook his vital force, nor prevented him from finding the appropriate means and ways, in each circumstance, to continue. The current Brazilian reality, with clear traces of neo-fascism and obscurantism, is also dark, frightening, threatening, and imposes countless difficulties for those who are committed to the education of the underprivileged. However, looking at Gramsci's trajectory, we can find there a source of inspiration and courage for an equally radical engagement in this task so as to undertake it by all means, in all ways, and in all possible spaces. Although this is a long-term work, perhaps it is the shortest way – in the field of education – to finally celebrate the conquest of the kingdom of freedom and to toast it, *all of us*, metaphorically and literally, with Barolo wine.

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