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The Rocky Road of Growth into Contemporary Citizenship: Dewey, Gramsci, and the Method of Democracy¹

Abstract

Characterized by globalization, increasing pluralism, and new complexities of citizenship, the contemporary world poses challenges to the ways in which we conceptualize of the processes of searching for shared solutions to ever-complicated social problems. While the political rhetoric emphasizes the value of citizens' participation, engagement, and "voices," there are increasing feelings of frustration, incapacity, and disinterest on behalf of the citizens regarding the supposed effects of their political engagement. In order to conceptually grasp the problem of searching for shared solutions and the related challenges to education, we draw on John Dewey's idea of the method of democracy and complement it with some critical perspectives inspired by Antonio Gramsci. We then reflect on the implications of these ideas on contemporary adult education by discussing the notion of competence within the theoretical framework that we develop. On the whole, our work aims to contribute in establishing a framework for understanding the role of adult education in the process of ensuring a functional democratic society.

Keywords

Citizenship, Dewey, Gramsci, hegemony, method of democracy, pluralism

Introduction

In contemporary Europe, citizen engagement and participation in the search for solutions to shared social problems and policymaking issues has been increasingly discussed.² Consequently, the meaning of democracy has expanded from liberal forms of governance in which citizens exercise their democratic rights by visiting ballot-boxes in free multiparty elections towards including more deliberative forms of democracy,³ involving citizens'

1 This article is a part of a larger research project, *Growth into Citizenship in Civil Society Encounters*, funded by the Academy of Finland. It is a consortium project in collaboration with the University of Eastern Finland (decision no. 2285733-9) and the University of Jyväskylä (decision no. 02458904-7).

2 Andrew Power, "EU Legitimacy and New Forms of Citizen Engagement," *Electronic Journal of e-Government* 8 (2010): 45-54.

3 See, for example, John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), doi: 10.1093/019925043X.001.0001.

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direct participation in debates concerning social challenges. These challenges, such as economic crises and climate change, are complex and global in scope. Furthermore, European societies face increasing pluralism as a result of secularization on the one hand, and the proliferating movement of people across the globe on the other. This is to say that they are the seats of multiple value systems that should all be considered in political decision making. Especially in the Nordic context with the rapid expansion in the number of immigrants and refugees, current political debates are characterized by a shift from a relatively homogenous value base towards a need to take into account and engage multiple religious, ideological, and cultural groups.

Along with the Habermasian theory of communicative action, John Dewey's ideas about "the method of democracy" have been a source of inspiration for those attempting to explain both the theoretical and practical foundations for citizens' participation as well as the ways in which citizenship competencies can be fostered so that such participation would actually occur. In this article, we will offer a new insight to the theoretical discussion on these issues. We first develop a framework derived from the work of two philosophers, John Dewey and Antonio Gramsci, both renowned for their work on democracy, participation, and education. We will then argue that combining the positive aspirations of John Dewey's (1859-1952) method of democracy with Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) analysis of hegemony provides a valuable framework for maneuvering along the rocky road of growth into contemporary citizenship.⁴

Background for Studying Dewey and Gramsci

Our main reason for selecting particularly these two philosophers is, basically, that both philosophers have defined the concept of democracy as extending beyond mere parliamentary structures. For Dewey, according to his often quoted description, "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."⁵ A Deweyan democracy requires a lot from its citizens, and Dewey specifically emphasized the role of education in fostering democratic success. Alternatively, in his work, Gramsci built upon and revised the communist idea of a party-led democracy by developing it into a conception of a "pluralist grassroots democracy."⁶ Emp-

4 The philosophical insights of both Dewey and Gramsci have been utilized in a number of approaches to adult education, such as progressive, experiential, critical, and transformative. We do not engage with these traditions *per se*. However, by means of philosophical analysis and the synthesis of the original texts of Dewey and Gramsci, we aim to find new perspectives on contemporary questions concerning adult education in the social and political context. In particular, our pursuit is to combine the positive possibilities of fostering democracy, typical of Deweyan approaches, with the emphasis of critical consciousness, typical of Gramscian approaches.

5 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 101.

6 Carlos Nelson Coutinho, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 19, doi: 10.1163/9789004230255. For Gramsci, this means, for example, advocating for factory councils as units of democracy in a critique of a hegemonic liberal democratic system. Along these lines, John Schwarzmantel contends

hasis here is placed on the capacities of each and every citizen in the realization of this new form of democracy, where every citizen can be said to “govern” in some way.⁷

Both Dewey’s and Gramsci’s ideas of democracy interpret citizenship as a process of engagement. Their ideas, although different in many ways, both relate interestingly to the current debates on the concept of citizenship, which is increasingly being understood as involving social membership in communities and networks not restricted within the borders of a particular state.⁸ As a result, the citizens’ commitment to solving problems outside of the traditional projects of nation-building requires new possibilities for participation.

At the same time, however, there are continuing trends of “there is no alternative”⁹ policymaking, which have been observed as limiting the possibilities of real participation on the part of the citizens. The political objective of actually listening to citizens’ voices is often realized strictly in order to allow for people to select from a set of more or less pre-defined options and to gain public approval for ready-made decisions that merely appear to have been made by the people themselves. For example, in the framework of neoliberal policy, concepts with positive connotations, such as “individual freedom” and “reform,” are used to motivate people’s consent to the implementation of privatization policies that may actually have negative consequences on their lives.¹⁰ As a result, the citizens’ frustration with such policies creates uncertainty and is parasitic upon their motivation to take part in shared problem-solving.

Generally speaking, the complexity of issues, the plurality of participants, and “quasi-democratic” engagement mechanisms now require that citizens have a new set of competencies in order to actively participate in this emerging democratic context. Obtaining such competencies increasingly takes place beyond traditional formal educational systems. For example, various civil society organizations, including associations established by migrants, neighborhood or civic education organizations, have assumed a significant role in developing such competencies by implementing a wide variety of programs in support of empowered and active citizenship. Drawing on Dewey, we suggest that the process of inculcation into fully active citizenship involves a continuous process of participation. However, the road to citizenship is a rocky one, and those very processes involve complex power struggles. The main objective of this article is to provide theoretical sign-posts for the journey along this road.

We employ the method of *rational reconstruction* in our philosophical analysis. Contrary to *historical reconstruction*, which aims at understanding the ideas of a philosopher

that the concept of democracy discussed in the “Prison Notebooks” was new and different from the orthodox communism in *The Routledge Guide to Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks* (London: Routledge, 2015), 60.

7 Gramsci, SPN, 40. SPN refers to the *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. 1971. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

8 See, for example, Sian Lazar, *The Anthropology of Citizenship: A Reader* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

9 This kind of “TNA policy” in the contemporary era has often been attributed to the neoliberal political regime of Margaret Thatcher. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 39-40.

10 Coutinho, *Gramsci’s Political Thought*, 159.

on his or her own terms and as a representative of his or her own particular time and context, rational reconstruction approaches philosophical texts in order to find new insights that may be helpful in answering contemporary questions.¹¹ The choice of the method of rational reconstruction implies, for example, that we do not read Gramsci primarily as a contributor to the Marxist tradition, or Dewey in relation to the American pragmatism of his time. Rather, we re-interpret the work of these scholars from the viewpoint of contemporary questions and problems. Consequently, we do not engage with the academic debates over the “proper” interpretations of Dewey and Gramsci.¹² In particular, we are interested in the conceptual understanding that we can tease out of the work of these two authors in order to make sense of the gap between the rhetoric of citizens’ participation and the practice of “there is no alternative” decision-making, and between the urgent need to collectively solve social problems and the apparent difficulties in attempting to do so. In other words, we are concerned with providing an adequate understanding of the processes of democratic deliberation while taking into account the power struggles involved and, in particular, how the proposed conceptualization relates to the challenges of contemporary adult citizenship education.

As a result of our analysis, we suggest that Dewey’s method of democracy complemented by Gramsci’s interpretation of hegemony, and in particular, his notions of consent and coherence, provide a valuable conceptual framework for addressing these concerns. In our view, this framework captures the importance of listening to “citizens’ voices” in the context of increasing plurality and complexity. However, this framework is not blind to the real-life problems that arise as a result of the constitution of the voices in the first place. In contrast, it provides conceptual tools for understanding the processes of obtaining consent and assuring a certain level of coherence with respect to the contributing voices so that they can be heard and taken into account in the processes of searching for shared solutions. Drawing on our conceptual work, we propose that citizenship education for adults should be administered as forms of continuous interactive support for effective participation, the construction of a coherent voice, and the ability to understand the ways in which political problems are framed.

11 Richard Rorty, “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres,” in *Philosophy in History: Essays on Historiography of Philosophy*, eds. Richard Rorty et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 50-56, doi: 10.1017/cbo9780511625534.006.

12 For example, as Gramsci’s texts are fragmented and at times more like political activism than theoretical elaboration, there are continuous critical debates over the definitions of his concepts, as well as his relation to Marxism and Leninism. In our attempt of rational reconstruction, our views are in line with those of Stuart Hall in his “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity” (in eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1996), 411-440, where he elaborates on how Gramsci distanced himself from the contemporary orthodox Marxism and further elaborated Marxist concepts in order to understand the “modern” world of his time. He innovatively used many existing theoretical formulations to illustrate the situation in Italy of his time. Since his time, Gramsci’s own concepts have been used and further refined, addressing a number of problems of hegemony such as race and gender, and not only in relation to the class struggle that was a burning issue in the political life of Gramsci’s Europe.

Dewey's Method of Democracy

*The method of democracy*¹³ is Dewey's proposal for a method for solving social problems.¹⁴ With this method, Dewey is not merely referring to general democratic procedures, such as voting or compromising, but to the wider possibilities of facilitating participation and cooperation, or methods that could foster "a mode of associated living."¹⁵ Dewey himself refers to his method as one of "*organized intelligence*," and its basic idea is to bring conflicting situations "out into the open where their special claims can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests than are represented by either of them separately."¹⁶

In his philosophy, Dewey emphasizes the social nature of intelligence¹⁷ and argues that interpreting intelligence as an individual possession was a fatal mistake of earlier liberalism.¹⁸ This idea, combined with Dewey's conception of knowledge, having its root in the evolutionary theory, as having evolved through adaptive processes into living circumstances, implies that Dewey rejects the arguments stating that only few human beings can achieve the intelligence sufficient for participating in the processes of solving shared problems.¹⁹ Everyone—or at least every group that has shared experiences—has intelligence regarding his or her own circumstances and situations in life. These local "intelligences" must all be taken into account in solving shared problems.

One important aspect of his method of democracy is that it takes *value pluralism* seriously.²⁰ The version of value pluralism we are referring here distinguishes itself, on the one

13 Dewey, *LW11*, 56. The numbered volumes of "LW" refer to John Dewey, *The Later Works of John Dewey*, ed., Jo Ann Boydston, 1985. Electronic edition ed. by Larry Hickman, 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.nlx.com/collections/41>.

14 The Deweyan concept of democracy as a whole cannot be considered within the limits of this article. It is therefore sufficient to summarize that the key to understanding Dewey's conception of democracy is to look at the interdependence between the concepts *individual*, *social*, *freedom*, and *participation*; the flourishing of one is dependent of the flourishing of others. Democracy, for Dewey, involves participation in various groups, both narrower and wider than the nation state and, in particular, the genuine contribution of the members of these groups to the common good and welfare. See, for example, Dewey, *LW2*, 326-333. For his view of the social classes of his time as related to a particular historical situation, see Dewey, *LW11*; *LW13*, and on how memberships of various partially separated and partially overlapping groups as characteristic of civil society can be seen as antecedents to some of the contemporary conceptions.

15 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 101.

16 Dewey, *LW11*, 56.

17 Dewey uses the concept of intelligence in different contexts. Some of his considerations of intelligence as a method relate to his arguments against using physical force to foster social progress. See Dewey, *LW11*, 46, 60. For example, "Liberalism and Social Action" in Dewey, *LW11*, 6-69 was published in 1935 and was thus Dewey's response to the threat of totalitarianism at the time.

18 Dewey, *LW11*, 35. According to Dewey, this mistake led, for example, to "laissez-faire liberalism." the economic and sociological position that he constantly criticizes (e.g., *LW11*).

19 Dewey, *LW11*, 39, 50-51.

20 Different versions of value pluralism have been defended among others, in Elisabeth Anderson, "Practical Reason and Incommensurable Goods," in *Incommensurability, Incomparability and Practical Reason*, ed. R. Chang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); John Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, eds. B. Williams et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511611964.008; and Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), doi: 10.1017/CBO9781139165860.

hand, from *value relativism* by accepting that there are some *primary values* which are related to basic physiological, psychological, and social needs,²¹ and on the other hand, it sets itself apart from value monism by accepting that there are *secondary values* varying fundamentally in relation to each individual person, culture, society, and historical period.²² The basic idea is to understand disagreements in relation to values as an inevitable consequence of the diverse value systems of the participants in a given problem-solving situation.²³ This version of pluralism, which is in our view compatible with Dewey's method of democracy, allows us to search for shared solutions without the underlying assumption that there might be only one predefined "right" solution to any moral, political, or social problem that we might face.

Another important part of Dewey's philosophy that is relevant to our work here is that it is fallibilist throughout. This is to say that for Dewey, epistemological fallibilism—the position which holds that all of our beliefs and belief systems are susceptible to error—is applicable not only to science but also to social, political, and moral inquiry. This implies that there can be no *a priori* knowledge concerning the best means for achieving goals, or the value of the goals themselves, or even the very methods of determining what these two might be. According to Deweyan fallibilism, everything must in principle be subjected to criticism. Dewey's method of democracy thus involves: (1) the idea of not knowing beforehand the values, political views, etc. on which the future solution should be based; (2) the stipulation that everything is open to discussion; and (3) the perspective that taking different voices into account is of crucial importance in order to find the best available solution.²⁴

However, there are two criticisms of Dewey's view that should be discussed if we want to effectively bring Dewey's philosophy into the contemporary discussion of democracy and citizenship. First, Dewey appears to be overly optimistic about his method of democracy; he seems to believe that the same kind of progress that had recently taken place in science and technology could be achieved in the social realm when the right method

21 As Kekes (1993) puts it, "Circumstances would have to be exceptional not to count as benefits to satisfy our basic physiological needs, to be loved, or to live in a society in which our endeavors are respected," in Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism*, 18. Nussbaum, for her part, develops a theory of things that "are so important that we will not count a life as a human life without them" as including such aspects as mortality, the human body, the capacity for pleasure and pain, cognitive capability, early infant development, practical reason, affiliation with other human beings, relatedness to other species and nature, humor and play, and separateness. See Martha Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice," *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 216-220; see also Katariina Holma, "Essentialism Regarding Human Nature in the Defense of Gender Equality in Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 41 (2007): x, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9752.2007.00543.x.

22 In contemporary academic discussion, there are many different conceptions termed "pluralism," such as political pluralism, value pluralism, and ethical pluralism, and, of course, different views of how these pluralisms should be defined.

23 Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism*, 23-27.

24 See also Katariina Holma and Tiina Kontinen, "Democratic Knowledge Production as a Contribution to Objectivity in Evaluation of Development NGOs," *Forum for Development Studies*, 39 (2012): 83-103, doi: 10.1080/08039410.2011.635379.

was developed and applied to this field of human cooperation.²⁵ As he writes about the method: “[i]t has not been tried at any time with use of all the resources that scientific material and the experimental method now put at our disposal.”²⁶ Today, we cannot hold such an optimistic view neither in relation to science nor to social and political problems.

Second, the very idea of the method of democracy can be questioned by the *inequality argument*, which claims that due to power relations in the real world, diverse opinions and value systems do not carry equal weight in negotiations.²⁷ Even though Dewey is concerned about the “inchoate public,”²⁸ he does not pay much attention to this strategic aspect of negotiations.²⁹

It is here that the Gramscian interpretation of hegemony and, in particular, Gramsci’s concepts of *consent* and *coherence*, become useful. These concepts, in our view, help us to understand more adequately the process of constituting a “voice” as well as the process of marginalizing some other voices.

Gramsci and the Coherence and Consent in Constituting a “Voice”

In this section, we will focus on two issues that appear to be problematic for Dewey’s method: first, the difficulties of the marginalized voices in producing contributions that would be coherent enough to be listened to and taken into account, and second, the need for conceptualizing the power-related processes that determine the very formulation of potential solutions.³⁰ In order to draw attention to these limitations, we derive our conceptual tools from Gramsci’s philosophy and his ideas on hegemony.³¹

25 See, for example, Dewey, *LW11*, 65.

26 Dewey, *LW11*, 38.

27 See also Roudy W. Hildreth, “Reconstructing Dewey of Power,” *Political Theory*, 37 (2009), doi: 10.1177/0090591709345454.

28 Dewey, *LW2*, 314-328.

29 This criticism has been presented by many scholars, not only regarding Dewey’s philosophy but also regarding philosophical pragmatism in general. Hildreth, however, has formulated an argument responding to these critiques. Accordingly, “power is an integral but implicit element of Dewey’s conception of human experience.” See Hildreth, “Reconstructing Dewey of Power,” 780.

30 Leona M. English and Peter Mayo (eds.), *Learning with Adults. A Critical Pedagogic Introduction* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012); see also Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

31 Gramsci’s theoretical legacy is fragmented and is mainly presented in the letters and unfinished notebooks from his imprisonment. The concept of hegemony has Greek origins in reference to leadership. For Gramsci, two sources of the concept were of central relevance. First, he discussed the theory of the ethico-political history of the Italian idealist philosopher Croce. Second, the Russian debate over the *gegemoniya* in the proletarian revolution, in contrast to the proletarian dictatorship, was an important source of inspiration. See Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” *New Left Review* 1 (100) (1976), retrieved from <http://newleftreview.org>. The concept of hegemony as a leading role of the proletariat in revolution was further extended to refer to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat, which was exercised in the sphere of ideology and culture rather than economy (Anderson, 18). This interpretation of hegemony and dictatorship as being an *alternative strategy* is challenged by Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 163, doi: 10.1163/ej.9789004167711.i-478. Here Thomas argues that consent attached to the characteristics of hegemony and coercion in a dictatorship in Gramsci’s analysis are in a *dialectical* relationship rather than posited as alternatives.

Gramsci's formulation of the concept of hegemony continues to be appropriated and debated in contemporary political and social research. While its definition is still being contested, in this article we base our argument on the interpretation of the Gramscian notion of hegemony as a way of maintaining the power of a certain group through "intellectual and moral leadership."³² Therefore, hegemony as a form of power is not based only on economic relations but also includes the cultural means of gaining and maintaining hegemony. We consider the notions of coherence characteristic to hegemony as being necessary to supplementing the Deweyan method of democracy.

Our first question concerns the quality and origin of the different voices participating in democratic problem-solving. Here, we are inspired by Gramsci's notion of *coherence*. In regard to hegemony, Gramsci is concerned about the ability of the subaltern groups to take part in social debate, and maintains that in order for their voices to constitute a real challenge to the prevailing hegemony, they should be based on a critical and coherent " ". While "being heard" is a cornerstone of the method of democracy, we suggest that in order for a "voice" to be heard, let alone motivating some sort of action, it should possess some degree of coherence, as well as a critical understanding of the rules of the game. According to Gramsci, such a critical achievement requires realization and reflection upon one's historical situation and the limitations provided by the language used in framing the problems. Gramsci argues that our conception of the world is often mechanically imposed by the social environment or reflects the ideology of the ruling groups, which is disseminated, for example, through education.³³ Creating one's own critical and coherent conception of the world therefore requires acknowledgement and critical analysis of one's own historical position.

With respect to the idea of intelligence, following Gramsci, we should keep in mind that the conceptions concerning societal problems and their societal contexts held by the commonly marginalized groups are usually fragmentary and incoherent. In Gramscian terms, such knowledge is practical and spontaneous, and based on direct experience.³⁴ It is not powerful enough for participation and contributions to struggles over hegemony. Consequently, it can be claimed that such knowledge does not constitute a "voice" that is coherent enough to be intelligently included in the framework of the method of democracy.

How, then, could it be possible to improve the coherence of the voice of a marginalized group whereby it could be used in arguments in a democratic context? The Gramscian suggestion of producing coherence into what he refers as the *common sense* provides a potential way of conceptualizing of such a process. For Gramsci, the common sense of people refers to the "diffuse, uncoordinated features of generic form of thought common

32 Gramsci, SPN, 57.

33 Ibid., 324-325.

34 Ibid., 198-199.

to a particular period and a particular popular environment.”³⁵ Thus, the main problem with common sense is its lack of unity and coherence in allowing for concise articulation and further advocacy.

As a way out of this problem, Gramsci suggests focusing on the positive and innovative aspects of common sense in order to foster the emergence of unity and coherence, that is, *good sense*.³⁶ The process of establishing coherence is at the core of Gramsci’s idea of the *philosophy of praxis* as a dialectical process of critical engagement with common sense and the particular problems raised by the masses, in conjunction with a critique of the existing philosophy of traditional intellectuals.³⁷ In this way, it would be possible to produce knowledge that is “superior to common sense” while ensuring that this knowledge is still in contact with practical activity and organic to the experiences of the masses.³⁸ This process, according to Gramsci, would require the leadership of *organic intellectuals* who originate from the subaltern groups themselves.³⁹

For Gramsci, the coherence of knowledge should lead to political action, and in his particular historical context, into societal hegemony earned by the proletariat. If Dewey’s experimental method opposes the *a priori* goals of negotiation, a Gramscian perspective would lead us to set goals in relation to changes in social power relations while considering the voices of the subaltern classes to be of the utmost importance.⁴⁰ In other words, if the inclusion of multiple voices for Dewey is more of an epistemological question, for Gramsci, the production of a coherent voice for the marginalized is merely a strategy in the struggle for the hegemony of the proletariat and the peasants, two of the main subaltern groups discussed in his work.

We now turn to discussing the notion of *consent* in gaining hegemony in the context of the Deweyan idea of intelligence. Consent, in contrast to coercion, is the main way through which power is exercised. Hegemonic power works by establishing consent to a certain world view and existing social power relations through various institutions in society. . For Gramsci, an example of how hegemonic power works is the prevailing and unquestioned

35 Ibid., 330.

36 Steven Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (London: Routledge, 2006), 54-55.

37 Ibid., 330-335.

38 Ibid., 330.

39 Ibid., 6, 15-16.

40 The question of predefined ends is, of course, a broad philosophical question which cannot be discussed within the limits of this article (see, for example, Katariina Holma, “The Critical Spirit: Emotional and Moral Dimensions of Critical Thinking,” *Studier i Pædagogisk Filosofi* 4 no. 1 (2015): 26-27. The idea of focusing on marginalized voices is not, however, in contradiction with Dewey’s philosophy. Rather, he should be interpreted as being reluctant to postulate any ends as *a priori* in the process of negotiation and critical thinking. Another difference from Gramsci is related to Gramsci’s commitment to the primary (epistemological) importance of marginalized voices. Dewey, again, would not assume *a priori* epistemological importance to any voice. Yet another difference is related to the definition of the marginalized, which Gramsci articulates in Marxist vocabulary, whereas Dewey’s notion is more open to the contextual variety of “marginalized.” In the later use of Gramscian thinking in post-colonial studies, discourse analysis, subaltern studies, feminist studies, and the like, the notion of “hegemonic” and “subaltern” groups has occupied increasing variety.

consent of the population to the leading position of the current dominant group.⁴¹ Such consent, in turn, may be given as a result of the economic position of the ruling group or the cultural and political leadership exercised by it.⁴² Educational institutions, mass media and civil society associations are especially central to the production of cultural hegemony. When certain views and perspectives of the world are continuously represented and repeated in the workings of these institutions, people will consent to these views as taken-for-granted state of affairs. Therefore, being reflective of different strategies of producing consent becomes central for constituting a “voice”.⁴³

Returning to the method of democracy, both the strategies of gaining hegemony and the mechanisms for maintaining it are important. The main question, though, concerns the kinds of strategies used to enable some voices to become hegemonic in the process of Dewey’s idea of experimentation, and more specifically, how these voices obtain consent from other groups in order to arrive at a shared solution. Gramsci identifies a number of strategies for obtaining such consent.⁴⁴ First, he mentions alliance building,⁴⁵ which includes transcending particular interests and adopting the interests of other groups,⁴⁶ as well as contributing to the increased coherence of the “voice” of the group in order to reach a solution.⁴⁷ Second, there is a strategy of gradual absorption and recruitment of the leaders of critical groups for them to adapt to the interests of the hegemonic groups.⁴⁸ Third, the divisions and positions of expertise established by the education system facilitates the provision of consent to the particular voices presented by the “specialists” as defined by the forces in control of bourgeois education.⁴⁹ Even today, positions requiring a certain kind of academic education are typically valued more in terms of prestige and salary than, for example, positions requiring technical expertise.

As a result of this interpretation, we suggest that in applying the democratic method to solving social problems, an analysis of the dynamics of alliance building, persuading the voices of other groups to fit with the group’s own voice, and the weight of certain kinds of expert knowledge, among other factors, should be acknowledged. When these are not paid

41 Gramsci, SPN, 12-13.

42 Gramsci, SPN, 12-13.

43 Originally, Gramsci was interested in strategies for gaining proletarian hegemony. Later, he also analyzed the mechanisms for gaining and maintaining existing bourgeois hegemony in order to better understand the dynamics by which such hegemony is established, Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*.

44 Gramsci discussed these strategies in relation to a variety of phenomena in his time, such as the question of the gap between the modern North and the agrarian South in Italy (SPW), the question of the Moderate Party gaining hegemony over the Action Party in the period of the *Risorgimento* (SPN), and the role of education and other cultural institutions in maintaining the hegemony of the ruling group (SPN). Gramsci, SPW II refers to *Selection from Political Writings 1921-1926*. (1978) Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

45 Gramsci, SPW II, 441-462.

46 Benedetto Fontana, “Hegemony and Rhetoric: Political Education,” in *Gramsci and Education*, eds. Carmel Borg, Joseph A. Buttigieg, Peter Mayo (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 28–29.

47 Wolfgang F. Haug, “Philosophizing with Marx, Gramsci, and Brecht,” *Boundary*, 2 (2007): 151-153.

48 Gramsci, SPN, 58-59, doi: 10.1215/01903659-2007-019.

49 Carmel Borg et al. eds., *Gramsci and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 8-9. See also Gramsci, SPN, 40.

attention to, the participation processes might turn out to be democratic only on surface. However, acknowledging such hidden hegemonic processes require specific competencies from those who participate in the democratic problem solving and decision making

The Question of Adult Education: Citizens' competencies

We will now reflect on the implications of our philosophical analysis in the previous section on contemporary adult education in the pursuit of citizens' competencies. On the basis of our synthesis of the Deweyan method of democracy and the Gramscian interpretation of the notions of coherence and consent, we stress three ways in which competencies can be developed among citizens: (1) education outside of the classroom and learning from participation in societal activities; (2) the employment of strategies to learn a shared language and establish a coherent voice for democratic participation; and (3) learning to identify and apply strategies for the process of obtaining and establishing consent.

As philosophers of education, Dewey and Gramsci did not only recommend changes for school systems and educational practices; they also saw the importance of education and learning in the informal sphere through participation and activism in everyday life, including work. Today, the increased social division of labor and professionalization has led to a reduction in the average citizen's capabilities to participate in debates on a number of social problems.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, the increasing complexity of these problems, such as climate change and global economic crises, has resulted in new demands with respect to citizens' capacities. As a consequence, the problems confronted by contemporary societies indicate that the competencies facilitated by formal education do not of themselves suffice in allowing citizens to exercise active citizenship during their entire life-span. In contrast, these competencies are gradually acquired through the processes of participating in work places, communities, and society in general.⁵¹ Thus, continuous learning by participating in multiple arenas of society is a necessity for meaningful citizen participation.

Both Dewey and Gramsci, in their own ways, were preoccupied with the connection between education and the possibilities for democracy. Despite their theoretical differences, both thought that genuine democracy necessitated widespread participation, and they firmly believed in peoples' capabilities to participate in democratic institutions and practices. Dewey's idea of the intelligence of all and Gramsci's claim that every man is a philosopher together place a common man— instead of an elite expert—at the center of social problem-solving.

However, the Deweyan notion of people's everyday intelligence in relation to their living circumstances can be challenged by Gramsci's understanding of common sense. For Gramsci, the common sense of the people is not sufficient for analyzing political problems

50 Joseph A. Buttigieg, "Education, the Role of Intellectuals, and Democracy: A Gramscian Reflection," in *Gramsci and Education*, eds. Carmel Borg et al. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 132.

51 See also Leona English and Peter Mayo, *Learning with Adults*.

and changing social situations; instead, it is in need of further development and refinement into a more coherent form of knowledge. Furthermore, according to Gramsci, not everyone has the natural capacities for the cultural and political leadership required for changing hegemonic relations; these capacities therefore need to be improved in those who possess them.⁵² Dewey was not blind to the problem of “the inchoate public” either; he believed that the different cultural, religious, and linguistic groups who share the same political space need education in order to learn the language of “experimentalese,” which was necessary for participating in the processes of solving shared problems.⁵³

Following Gramsci, we propose that one important aspect of learning “experimentalese” and achieving a collective voice that is able to participate in shared decision making relates to the competencies for building the very coherence that is needed for such a voice to emerge. For Gramsci, the most relevant competencies include an ability to critically analyze the conditions of the situation and the effects of hegemony in defining the problem and proposed set of solutions; for Dewey, such competency mainly includes the ability to engage in meaningful interaction and joint experimentation in pluralist contexts. All in all, the implication for adult education is that learning certain strategies to gain a shared language and a coherent voice for democratic participation must be fostered. This entails encouraging, mobilizing, and facilitating groups to participate with each other, engage in coherence building, and further the learning of “experimentalese” in interaction with other groups.

Whereas Dewey is mainly preoccupied with the individual and group level competencies for participation in shared problem solving, Gramsci pays more attention to the social and economic power relations both enabling and hindering participation. As the ultimate goal for learning and participation for Gramsci was the transformation of class relations, the central citizenship competencies therefore include the ability to analyze the functions of the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. In Gramsci’s view, a change in the social power relations requires increasing theoretical and practical consciousness in order to contest the prevailing common sense.⁵⁴ In contemporary Western societies, where the complex set of power relations cannot be reduced only to class, and where the explicit use of state power in form of coercion is relatively rare, the ability to identify cultural and political hegemonies has become increasingly important. Learning both to identify the ways in which consent has been produced in the context of framing the problems to be discussed and to facilitate consent in favor of the group’s coherent voice are essential processes. Citizens should be able to identify how the problems have been framed, how the society-level consent has

52 Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci. Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 1979), 112, 125.

53 Dewey, *LW2*, 314-328; see also Leonard J. Waks, “Post-Experimentalist Pragmatism,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 17 (1997): 17, doi: 10.1023/A:1004937320174.

54 Stanley Aronowitz, “Gramsci’s Theory of Education: Schooling and Beyond,” in *Gramsci and Education*, eds. C. Borg et al. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 115.

been obtained, and be alert to the potential “there is no alternative” policies behind the perceived set of solutions.

In real life situations, the Deweyan ideals of everything being open to discussion and the best solution being found via the process of discussion and experimentation are often hampered by pre-existing political and economic interests that pre-define what is and is not open to discussion. Furthermore, in situations where a group’s voice has gained sufficient coherence to enter into democratic problem solving negotiations, citizens should have the competencies to generate consent in relation to their concerns, for example, by being able to build alliances. In the context of plurality, Gramsci’s original suggestion of the need for the working class to gain the consent of the peasants, another subaltern group in Italy in Gramsci’s time, is applicable to a wide variety of groups such as people of different genders, sexual orientations, ethnic origins, disabilities, or long-term unemployed. His idea of the main means of alliance building as learning others’ worldviews and languages is especially relevant today.⁵⁵ In today’s societies, the ability to perceive problems from the viewpoint of other value systems is a necessary condition for effective alliance building to solve shared problems.

Conclusions

Democratic participation is challenged by the increasing amount of various cultural, ethnic, and religious groups having different value systems and varying educational backgrounds. At the same time, the increasing complexity of social and political problems enables political elites to make decisions without any real process of democratic decision-making. The voices of different groups are rarely included in solving shared problems, let alone in the processes of defining those problems. In the current policy environment, marginalization does not only apply to the “traditional” marginalized groups, but also the so-called elites, such as academics and middle-class employees struggling to participate due to the ways in which such problems have started to directly affect them, for example as results from the economic crisis or austerity measures especially effecting labor in information and knowledge industry. The lack of coherence in their voice implies that the particular views, interests, and concerns of many members and groups within our democracies never enter the arenas where the method of democracy is exercised. Without coherence, their voices remain scattered and are articulated mainly in everyday conversations at home or at work, or in discussion forums on the internet. Therefore, the process of “growth into citizenship” in the contemporary era is an ongoing effort of learning by experimenting and participating in the continuous efforts of coherence building and the establishment of consent.

In this article, we have focused on two philosophers who have developed conceptions of democracy as participation, and, in particular, educational theories related to the com-

55 Gramsci, SPW II.

petences of citizens in such democracies. We have constructed a synthesis of the Deweyan conception of the method of democracy, based on the philosophical background of pluralism and fallibilism, and the Gramscian conception of hegemony as a form of power based on consent, having its background in Marxist philosophy. In our view, this synthesis provides a fruitful departure point for reconsidering the relationship between democracy and education in today's societies.

We have discussed the implications of our synthesis in the context of informal adult education. In our view, many of the competencies required of the citizen of a contemporary pluralist democracy are learned by participating in the processes of shared problem-solving in workplaces, communities, associations, and society in general. We suggested, in a Gramscian spirit, that adult education should focus on facilitating the learning of strategies to establish a coherent voice, and in a Deweyan fashion, the learning of "experimentalese" for general productive interaction and listening to other groups.

We have also discussed the challenge faced by educational institutions based on the way in which social power relations affect the possibilities of participation. Borrowing from Gramsci, we suggest that education should focus on identifying how the so-called shared problems have been framed in order to obtain the critical tools required for challenging "there is no alternative" policies.

Proposing a detailed outline for adult education capable of providing competencies for citizenship in today's complex societies is a challenging task. Our synthesis of Deweyan and Gramscian philosophies aims to contribute to the task of ultimately constructing a theoretical approach to adult education, which could include both the Deweyan optimism in the possibilities of genuine democracy and the Gramscian emphasis on critical consciousness as a necessary condition for substantive participation.