

Community and Contestation

A Gramscian Case Study of Teacher Resistance

This paper focuses on a specific example of an all-too-rare phenomenon in education studies: the successful resistance by ordinary classroom teachers of policy change at the macro-level. Focusing on the withdrawal of the 2013 Draft National Curriculum for History in England, it considers the views of six teachers who were personally involved in active resistance.

Building on Gintin and Margonis' (1995) view that teacher resistance can represent 'good sense', it is suggested that teachers' self-described conceptualisations of this resistance are best understood in Gramscian terms. The paper does not propose the political theory of Gramsci as a blueprint for effective resistance, but instead suggests that categories which Gramsci associated with resistance to capitalism might emerge organically within other sites of resistance, and even among those unfamiliar with Gramsci's work. Furthermore, it implies that theoretically-informed transformative intellectuals of the kind described by Giroux (1988) might still be found working in neoliberal education systems.

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Soon after the Conservative Party victory in the UK election victory of May 2010, Education Secretary Michael Gove promised an overhaul of the history curriculum in England. Speaking at the Conservative Party Conference, he promised to uproot the existing syllabus which he saw as 'trashing' the nation's past and to replace it with one which 'put British History at [its] heart' (Gove, 2010). In February 2013, Gove delivered on his promise; announcing a new National Curriculum before parliament which, he claimed, had 'a proper emphasis on heroes and heroines from our past' (Gove, 2013a).

This curriculum, however, would never see the inside of an English classroom. Within hours of the draft curriculum's release, opposition to it had mobilised on social media; within days, criticism began to appear in the press and, within months, the curriculum was withdrawn and replaced (Smith, 2017). The scale of this retreat was remarkable. While the UK Historical Association decried the draft for 'throwing away' 'more than twenty years of thoughtful and sophisticated approaches to curriculum development' (Historical Association, 2013a), they praised its replacement as offering due 'respect for teachers' expertise' (Historical Association, 2013b).

Curriculum wars such as this are, of course, far from unique (Taylor & Guyver, 2011). However, this paper seeks to emphasise an underexplored dimension of this contestation: the role of ordinary practising classroom teachers in actively resisting curriculum at the macro-level. The six teachers interviewed for this research were notable for their willingness to challenge policy; by writing to elected representatives, joining online campaigns or responding to government consultations. In this sense, this work bridges a gap between the many studies of elite discursive contestation at policy level and the equally numerous studies which identify teacher resistance at school level.

This paper suggests that the existence of a shared counterhegemonic discourse was crucial in both uniting opponents of the curriculum and in the ultimate success of their resistance. In this respect (and some others) I will suggest that Antonio Gramsci's political philosophy of effective resistance to capitalism offers a suitable interpretative heuristic for teachers' readiness to resist and one that can tell us much about why such resistance was effective.

The paper will now look at existing research which emphasises teacher resistance at the micro-political level. It will suggest that while such resistance can be locally effective, larger scale resistance necessitates the existence of a shared unifying narrative which transcends the differences between school contexts. The paper will then explore the Gramsci's philosophy of resistance and demonstrate how this may be applicable to teacher activism at a policy level. The final empirical section of the paper will explain how these theoretical insights have been derived directly from the words of teachers who actively engaged in resistance.

1.1 Current conceptions of teacher resistance

The magisterial work of Dan Lortie casts a shadow over all subsequent discussions of teacher resistance. *'Schoolteacher: a sociological study'* (Lortie, 1975) created a powerful characterisation of teachers as conservative, individualistic and present-oriented; a portrayal that Hargreaves has since termed 'an unholy trinity' (Hargreaves, 2010). Lortie argues that the organisation of schooling, staffroom dynamics and tradition all act to create a present-oriented mindset which teachers find it difficult to think beyond. For Lortie, these dispositions emerged because of the absence of a 'common technical culture'; meaning each teacher formed his identity in isolation, from 'idiosyncratic experience and personal synthesis' (1975, pp. 79-80).

Lortie's account of the teacher as conservative individualist has found its most celebrated manifestation in the 'school-change' or 'school improvement' paradigm which casts teacher resistance as an 'obstacle' to be surmounted on the path to 'improvement' (Wrigley, 2013). This research offers guidance for school leaders in delivering change, often in the face of a sceptical or resistant teacher workforce. Within this paradigm (and building on Lortie), teacher resistance is given short-shrift: it is either a product of misplaced self-preservation or a failure on the part of the resistor

to 'properly' understand the proposed reform (Zimmerman, 2006). This cynical view of resistance has proceeded in lock-step with disciplining measures which have reduced the space for such resistance. In England, researchers have highlighted the role of the schools' inspectorate (OFSTED) in ensuring teachers' compliance with the prevailing neoliberal norms and have emphasised the emotional toll that this takes (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Perryman, 2007). Even in the absence of such direct surveillance, Moore *et al.* (2002) have argued that the neoliberal discourse itself has caused teachers to become less openly and actively oppositional by emphasising the 'virtues' of 'pragmatism', 'compromise' and 'what works'.

Despite these gloomy assessments, interactionist studies of curriculum implementation have argued that resistance to unwanted curriculum change is widespread, but that those looking for a grand narrative of resistance are looking in the wrong place. For these researchers, resistance occurs at the micro-political level of the school or classroom and without much fanfare. As Gintin and Margonis (1995) have pointed out, teachers often resist reflexively or instinctively in circumstances where policy change impacts on their core ethical values, but that they lack the alternative discourses to argue intellectually against it. In this view, the lack of this shared discourse (analogous to Lortie's 'common technical culture') means that their resistance can seem undertheorised and, consequently, self-interested when, in fact, it has been informed by 'good sense'. Kelchtermans (2005) has summarised this position by arguing that 'reform agendas that impose different normative beliefs may not only trigger intense feelings, but also trigger micropolitical actions of resistance' (p. 995).

Many studies have uncovered examples of mediation of the curriculum by teachers which could be interpreted as resistance. In England, Vulliamy and Webb (1995) showed that primary schools were mediating the new National Curriculum so that it more closely aligned with existing practice and teachers' values, while Ball and Bowe argued that the secondary curriculum was 'not so much being "implemented" in schools as "re-created"' (1992, p. 115). However, although the phenomenon of policy 'refraction' is visible across the world (Goodson & Rudd, 2012), the extent to which this might truly be considered *resistance* can be debated. A large scale empirical study in England argued that policy is inevitably changed when it is *enacted*, but that most of these changes are unconscious; simply the product of making government policy 'work' in the unique contexts of individual schools (Ball, et al., 2012). In other words, mediation of policy can be indicative of principled resistance, but it is just as likely explained by more prosaic logistical considerations.

Two points must, therefore, be made about these interactionist interpretations of resistance. The first is that although micropolitical action can be *effective*, it is unlikely to be *transformative*. For every school that resists policy by disregarding, subverting or mediating it, there will be several more which adopt the policy uncritically, albeit enacted in different ways. The second limitation of such resistance is the absence of a shared discourse of opposition that may allow such resistance to transcend the borders between schools. There is resistance, to be sure, and much of it is informed by something more than simple self-interest, but the context of this resistance is far too localised – resistance which transcends the variation between schools necessitates a common discourse of resistance. McLaren (1986) summarises this problem when he writes, 'our agency [as teachers] has been dispersed on the predatory horizon of micro-politics, with no understanding of oppression or the collective action to change it' (p.87).

Michael Apple has done more than most to highlight and emphasise micro-political resistance; whether it be the subversive intent of the university reading group (Apple, 1993) or the passive resistance of teachers refusing to use government-mandated resources (Apple, 1986: Pp 36-38). However, Apple is also realistic about the limited transformative potential of such resistance, contrasting it unfavourably with the remarkable ability of right-wing populism to effect curriculum change at a national level. Apple's analysis of the way that hegemony operates through a disparate

coalition of business, free-market ideologues and social conservatives has resonance for history teachers, since clashes over the history curriculum are regularly framed as a battle between populist 'common sense' and the intellectual handwringing of liberal elites (Nash, et al., 1997). Reflecting on this, Apple has urged activists to 'study the right' to consider how a similarly effective progressive movement might be constructed (2007). This paper offers an example of how such progressive resistance to hegemony in education might be mobilised, arguing that the construction of a shared counter-hegemonic narrative – arrived at democratically – is crucial if resistance is ever to move beyond the level of the micro-political.

In this respect, this paper offers an argument which extends the work of Henry Giroux. For Giroux, neoliberal school reform is both a cause and effect of the proletarianization of the teacher workforce in which teachers are treated as 'high-level technicians by experts far removed from the realities of everyday life' (1988, p. 121). Giroux's remedy requires recasting teachers as 'transformative intellectuals who combine scholarly reflection and practice in the service of educating students' (p. 122). For teachers to engage in a debate about schooling, Giroux argues, 'it is necessary that a theoretical perspective be developed' (p. 122) which makes 'the pedagogical more political and the political more pedagogical... by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle to define meaning and a struggle over power relations' (p. 127). For Giroux, this re-intellectualisation of teachers simultaneously offers an alternative to Lortie's individualistic teacher identity and an antidote to the regressive hegemony in education which Apple describes. This framing of teachers as intellectuals will feature prominently in this case-study, but Giroux (and Gramsci) are clear that these intellectuals are effective only if they act collectively. Like Giroux, Sachs (2003) has written about a 'transformative professionalism' in which 'self-knowledge' and 'collective strategy' are crucial (2003, pp. 14-15). For Sachs, a strong defining 'self-narrative' underpins this transformative professionalism and 'provide[s] a glue for collective professional identity' (p. 132). This paper suggests that subject-identity could provide this 'glue' and also offer a highly-theorised transformative discourse which transcends the differences between individual school contexts.

Such a subject-activist professional identity has been observed in other studies of history teachers. In Australia, Hilferty (2007) found that history teachers used historical arguments about the dangers of state control of education to assert a 'right to contribute to curriculum policy making' (p. 242). In England, Fordham (2012; 2016) has argued that history teachers are united by a disciplinary identity built around a 'Stenhousian' vision of curriculum-making, in which teachers exercise considerable intellectual judgement over what and how to teach, an argument which is echoed here. Goodson (2011), meanwhile, has suggested that history teachers might be uniquely placed to be critical about curriculum change as their disciplinary expertise allows them to see beyond the historical-social milieu within which they are working. That said, such a critical positioning is not universal. In the US, James (2008) found that preservice teachers were extremely resistant to teaching elementary-stage children about diverse historical interpretations, arguing that such an approach promoted a moral ambiguity which was harmful to young children. In Ireland, O'Boyle (2004) spoke to teachers who rejected the explicit teaching of disciplinary knowledge and discouraged children from offering their own opinions on complex and controversial topics.

2. The contribution of Gramsci

The work of Antonio Gramsci has had considerable influence in the field of critical educational research, most notably through the work of Paulo Freire. However, while Freire uses Gramsci to conceptualise emancipatory education for subaltern groups, this paper suggests that Gramsci's analysis of resistance to the state might help us understand policy-level teacher resistance to school reform. To develop this argument, the paper will first give a brief outline of the relevant aspects of

Gramsci's political theory before drawing parallels with theoretical debates about the history curriculum.

2.1 Thinking with Gramsci

Gramsci's most significant contribution to Marxist thought is, without doubt, the concept of 'hegemony' as the totality of mechanisms through which the ruling-class maintains its position. In this conception, the institutions of civil society – the media, education and the church – create and reinforce hegemony by setting the boundaries of the thinkable and the unthinkable, of the possible and the impossible. In this way, Gramsci contended, advanced capitalism had no need to subjugate its populations by force; instead hegemony manufactures consent by presenting exploitation as inevitable, and reactionary politics as 'common sense'. These common-sense ideas are enormously powerful for they offer a superficially attractive explanation of the 'reality' of the world which is assimilated into the belief systems of subaltern groups. Once such a common-sense worldview is adopted, it becomes difficult for with working class to critique or 'think against' dominant discourses. This is not a simple matter of false-consciousness; Gramsci describes common sense as 'an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept' (1971, p. 423) which contains 'a healthy nucleus of good sense' (1971, p. 328). Contemporising this argument, Apple writes,

The first thing to ask about an ideology is not what is false about it, but what is true. What are its connections to lived experience? Ideologies, properly conceived, do not dupe people. To be effective, they must connect to real problems, real experiences. (2000, p. 20)

Gramsci, therefore, poses a challenge to structuralist conceptions of Marx which treat civil society as a mere superstructural manifestations of the underlying economic relations. For Gramsci, the base and superstructure are reciprocal and indivisible, necessitating a re-conceptualisation of the strategy for resisting power. The capitalism that Gramsci observed from his Italian prison did not seem to be in imminent danger of collapsing under its own contradictions, as Marx had expected. Indeed, the capitalism which had survived both a world war and an influenza pandemic seemed instead to be morphing into an even more sinister form as fascism swept across Europe.

In addressing these unfavourable circumstances, Gramsci made two important observations. Firstly, hegemony could only be opposed by a similarly all-encompassing counter-hegemony. Gramsci was clear that this could not simply be the obscure ideology of the Leninist vanguard, instead it needed to have the same common-sense appeal as the hegemony it opposed. Gramsci described this enlightened common sense as 'good sense' and argued – as we have seen - that all common sense (however regressive) contained elements of good sense, which 'deserve to be made more unitary and coherent' (1971, p. 328). To take a contemporary example, there exists a 'common sense' view that that defrauding the welfare system is wrong, but such a narrow view serves to maintain hegemony by obscuring the *good* sense that all fraud of the public purse (including the infinitely more costly routine tax evasion of large corporations) is wrong. The ideological work of the left, therefore, was not a studious adherence to the esoteric texts of Marxism, but the construction of a guiding philosophy which incorporated – and was accessible to - the common sense lived experience of ordinary people. For Gramsci, a key strength of hegemony was its ability to change and adapt its argument to remain 'true' at a common-sense level. Consequently, any counter-hegemony must not just possess the same explanatory power as the hegemony it opposed but must also possess the capacity to adapt and evolve in the face of this ever-changing hegemony.

This observation gave rise to Gramsci's second important contribution: the wars of 'manoeuvre' and 'position'. The resilience of capitalism after 1917 led Gramsci to reject the Marxist-Leninist view that

the inevitable collapse of capitalism needed only a militarised vanguard to deliver the *coup de grace*. He argued instead that hegemony's ability to reinvent itself to speak to changing circumstances necessitated a counter-hegemony which was able to do the same. For Gramsci, any final militarised victory over capitalism (the war of manoeuvre) would necessarily be preceded by an unending 'war of position' in which the ideologies of hegemony and counter-hegemony responded to each other's challenges and insights. For Gramsci, 'to fix one's minds on the military model is the mark of a fool: politics... must have priority... only politics creates the possibility for manoeuvre and movement' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 232).

The final step in understanding Gramsci's conception of resistance, is to understand his conception of the political party. Gramsci makes two observations in this respect. First, the party must embody the *collective* will of the membership. This does not mean that it simply ventriloquises its members' views - for these may be informed by common, rather than good, sense - instead it rationalises them and conceives them as a totality. Gramsci argued that since progressive politics were inevitably diffuse and entropic, a political party was needed to unify and refine the critiques of capitalism's opponents. Gramsci described its role thus,

The modern prince, the prince-myth, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual; it can only be an organism, a complex element of society, in which a collective will... begins to take concrete form. Such an organism has already been provided by historical development and it is the political party the first cell in which germs of collective will come together and tend to become universal and total (Gramsci, 1971, p. 129)

The second feature of Gramsci's ideal party was a form of representation called 'organic centralism' wherein 'organic intellectuals' remained in constant contact with their members. Organic intellectuals are members of the working class who comprehend the totality of hegemonic oppression yet remain to some extent subject to that oppression. These leaders would retain credibility among the members of the working class and the ability to speak to their lived experience. Gramsci called for

a continuous adaptation of the organization to the true movement, a blending of pressures from below with leadership from above, a continuous insertion of elements which emerge from the depths of the masses into the solid framework of the directing apparatus which will ensure continuity and regular accumulation of experience (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 188-189).

Gramsci's organic centralism stands in opposition to Lenin's notoriously undemocratic 'democratic centralism'. Since Gramsci argued that hegemony was constantly mutating, a Leninist vanguard would not only be unaccountable, but also ineffective.

2.2 Gramsci and the history curriculum

It may seem that the preceding discussion has taken us a long way from questions of teacher resistance to curriculum change, however this paper contends that many of the concepts discussed above have analogues in English history teacher resistance to the 2013 draft National Curriculum for History. To make sense of this, we must first consider what the terms 'hegemony' and 'counter hegemony' might mean in the specific context of history curricula.

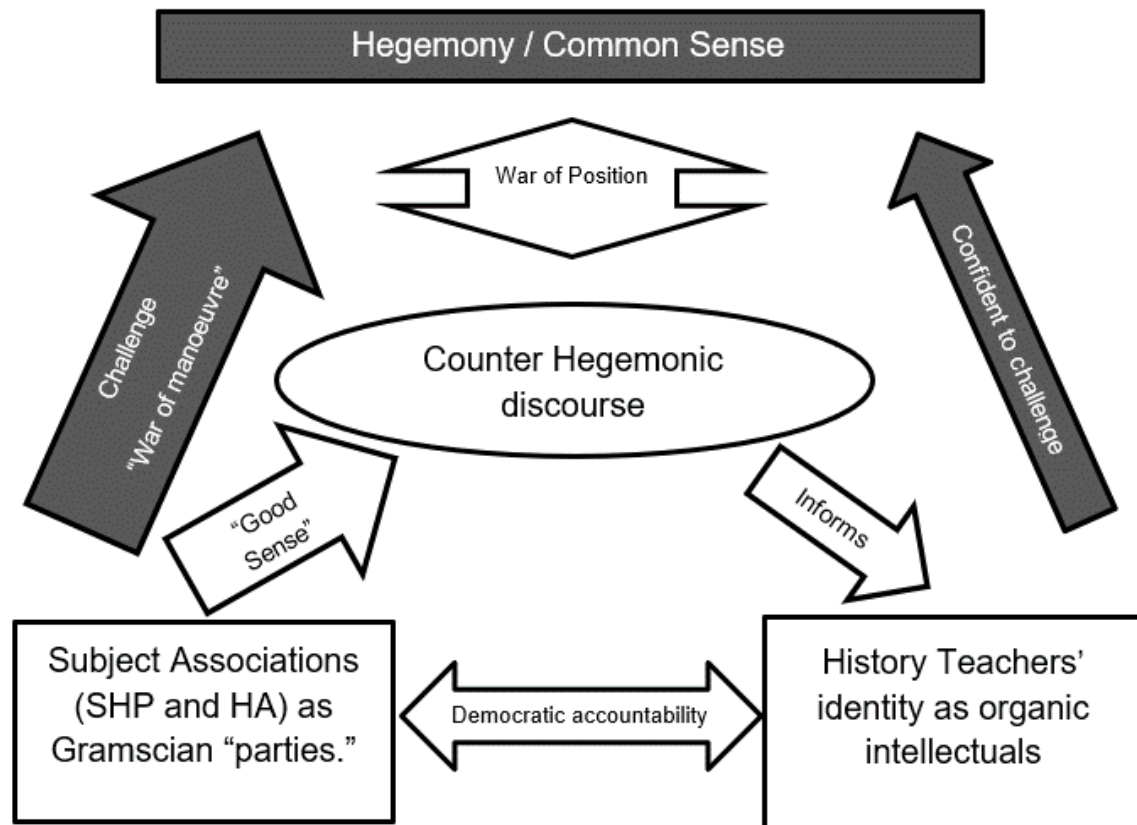
Broadly, a hegemonic curriculum is one which - through either accident or design - seeks to preserve the political status quo. It might do this in two ways: through the selection of content (i.e. topics and periods to be studied) or methodologically (i.e. by encouraging an uncritical acceptance of master narratives). Like Gramsci's conception of hegemony, the notion of common sense is important in buttressing these kinds of curricula. It is, we are reassured, 'common sense' that history should focus

on one's own country (Abulafia, et al., 2013b) and that the curriculum should consist of a singular narrative of important and uncontested facts. Part of the common-sense appeal of a canonical curriculum is therefore its apparent neutrality – lists of people and events *feel* superficially impartial, a merely factual list of what everyone agrees it is important to know. In all these respects, the draft curriculum was a 'common sense curriculum': a chronologically ordered list of some 60 events and 28 named individuals focusing exclusively on the history of Britain.

Counter-hegemonic history, in contrast, denies the powerful the right to define which events or people are 'significant' or 'worthy' of study. It does this not just by asserting the importance of marginalised events or subaltern figures, but by questioning the ontological arrogance of an 'approved list'. In this view, lists of approved knowledge are the products of selection which can never be objective or even random. As Heater wrote some fifty years ago, 'Because it is impossible to study the whole of world history the overt act of selection is itself an act of distortion' (1964, p. 47). Emerging in the 1970s, New History questioned the 'inherited consensus' (Slater, 1992) on what children should be taught. Instead of the memorisation of a single narrative, it was argued that children should engage with historical evidence in a way which allowed them to construct their own narratives (Schools' History Project, 1976; Rogers, 1979). In doing so, children would learn that all narratives are essentially constructions and that the value of a narrative was determined by the extent to which it was rooted in evidence. This approach has changed much since the 1970s, but an insistence of an evidence-based approach to history has had considerable influence on history curricula across the world including England (Counsell, 2011), New Zealand (Ormond, 2011) and Canada (Seixas & Morton, 2013).

In all jurisdictions, these two conceptions of history occasionally clash in short-lived 'curriculum wars' wherein the two competing visions aim to advance their own interests (Linethal & Englehardt, 1996; Foster & Crawford, 2006; Taylor & Guyver, 2011). In England, two such clashes have occurred: one when the National Curriculum was first introduced in 1991 (Crawford, 1995; Phillips, 1998), and second – the focus of this paper – which occurred in 2013 (Smith, 2014; 2017). This paper, however, is not focused on the 'clash' itself, but on the involvement of practising classroom teachers within this clash. It contends that the coherence of the counter-hegemony - combined with the structure and organisation of the English history teaching community - empowered ordinary teachers to openly resist and challenge the imposition of the curriculum. Crucially, though, this counter-hegemonic conception was not a reheated New History discourse from the 1970s, instead the processes of internal discussion and debate within the history teaching community have ensured that counter-hegemonic critiques are refreshed and remain relevant.

Figure one shows this argument diagrammatically. It should be noted that two discourses can be seen: an internal discourse (shown in white) and an external discourse shown by the shaded boxes. Much existing research into 'curriculum wars' focuses on the explosive moments of conflict shown by the shaded boxes; this paper seeks to emphasise the importance of the internal discourses in informing these. The processes shown by the white boxes show the processes through which both ideology and strategy are debated and decided upon. The internal processes of debate and democracy therefore have two functions: to unify the community and to inform an unending dialectical war of position with proponents of hegemonic curricula.



3. Methodology

In concentrating only on the minority of teachers who opposed the draft, this research makes no claims to typicality. Instead it is a ‘causes of effect’ case study (Rohlfing, 2012) which studies the mechanisms through which resistance operates. That said, we might reasonably ask how widespread such active opposition was. Our best guide in this endeavour is the Department of Education’s own consultation which tells us that 455 responses were received (DfE, 2013b, p. 10) and that this was more than any other subject (p. 7). We know, too, that the UK Historical Association received 1600 responses to a survey about the draft, of which 96% were critical (Historical Association, 2013c). From this we can infer that around 1530 history teachers (or 9.5%) out of a total population of 16,100 English history teachers (Office of National Statistics, 2014) *actively* opposed the draft. Given the inevitable scepticism about the efficacy of government consultation exercises, a response rate of nearly 1 in 10 history teachers implies the existence of an engaged subject community which felt confident of effecting change.

Participants were recruited after a questionnaire was distributed by a large provider of teacher education in the North West of England. Questions were varied and gathered usual contextual and demographic data (e.g. respondent age/ type of school/ years of experience etc.). Respondents were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with nine statements about the draft (e.g. ‘the draft focuses too much on British history’) and were assigned a ‘criticism score’ based on this data. Similarly, respondents were offered a list of potential actions they could have taken to oppose the draft (e.g. wrote to elected representative, completed government consultation etc.) and assigned a ‘resistance score’ which was used to facilitate purposive sampling.

Although the number of responses received (32) was far too small to draw any meaningful conclusions, there were some noticeable correlations evident. The first of these was an apparent inverse relationship between age and willingness to protest: for example, although the 21-30 age bracket and the 51+ age bracket were similarly critical of the draft (average of 7 criticisms for both cohorts), the younger group was more than three times as likely to take *action* to oppose the draft. Another apparent correlation was more relevant to the present study: respondents were asked 'Do you think there exists a history teaching community?' and three options were given. When the 'Resistance scores' of these cohorts are compared, it was apparent that those teachers who had self-identified as part of the 'History teaching community' were more willing to resist.

Do you think there exists a history teaching community?	Frequency	Mean Protest Score
Yes, and I feel part of it	14	2.5
Yes, but I don't feel part of it or want to be part of it.	11	1.7
No	7	

Overall, six respondents were interviewed: five with high resistance scores and a sixth, deviant, case with a resistance score of zero. The five case studies of resistance were selected to maintain a section of gender, age/experience and school context; this was necessary for at least two reasons. Firstly, to ensure a diversity of voices; and secondly to isolate factors contributing to resistance which were not demographically or contextually determined. A sampling approach which did not ensure a demographic cross-section would tend towards reductive or deterministic conclusions i.e. people opposed the draft *because* they were young. The purpose of the study was not to determine which kinds of people opposed the draft curriculum, but *why* some people (irrespective of age or context) did so.

Pseudonym	Age	Reason for selection for interview	Details of school context in which s/he works
Anna	Under 30	High level of engagement in the history community, high level of resistance	Large inner city comprehensive. Below average academic attainment.
Rebecca	Under 30	Prioritises role of the history teacher community in resistance	Large comprehensive in area of high income. High academic attainment.
Peter	30-45	Prioritises student interest and engagement in reasons for resisting	Small suburban comprehensive in area of high income. Low academic attainment.
Chris	30-45	Framed critique and resistance in terms of historical epistemology.	Large suburban comprehensive in an area of high income. High academic attainment.
Eric	Over 45	Head of History/ seniority	Large rural comprehensive in area of high income. High academic attainment.
Mary	Over 45	Zero resistance score	Small suburban comprehensive in area of high income. High academic attainment

Semi-structured interviews took place in the participants' own schools and were between 45 and 70 minutes in duration. These interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed in full. Coding of these transcripts identified emergent categories such as criticisms of the draft; discussions of historiography; engagement in the subject community, collectivism, leadership and resistance. These codings demonstrated the centrality of discourse in understanding the process of contestation,

initially inviting a post-structuralist analysis. However, it was quickly apparent that while such readings were enormously helpful for interpreting debates over the history curriculum, they could not accommodate the various dimensions of organised and collectivist resistance that were evident. The theoretical frame offered by Gramsci allowed the analysis to incorporate both the post-modern discursive construction of power, and a thoroughly modernist collectivist approach to resistance.

While coding was completed rigorously, it is important to state that these transcripts were read from a critical social science perspective which was underpinned by a respect and sympathy for the resisters and their resistance, rather than a grounded approach. Inevitably, such a critical perspective carries the risk that the researcher might impute motivation where none exists. As Ball writes, 'Too often in education studies, theory becomes a mantric reaffirmation of belief rather than a tool for exploring and thinking otherwise' (Ball, 2006, p. 64). However, this research was not a study of teachers' political ideologies, but an analysis of their resistance. Consequently, while resistance was read from a critical Marxist standpoint, I made no assumptions that participants shared such a standpoint. Instead, the research focuses on how emerging themes could be seen to interact and intersect with each other; it is these interactions and intersections which I describe as 'Gramscian', not the ideologies of individual participants. However, this paper is better served, I think, by an honesty about my own positionality and biases than by an appeal to an elusive notion of objectivity.

4. Interpretation of findings

This final section will interpret the words of interviewees in relation to the Gramscian concepts explored in section 2. It will focus most closely on four of these concepts and will show that respondents' disciplinary understanding of history and their relationship with the English history education community influenced both their understanding of the draft curriculum and their responses to it. The data from the interviews will be considered under five sub-headings

1. **Identifying hegemony** – An analysis of interviewee responses when asked their view of the draft.
2. **Counter-Hegemony and Thinking against** – An analysis of the interviewee critiques of the draft
3. **The war of position** – An analysis of how interviewees arrived at these critiques and how these critiques have evolved over time.
4. **The Gramscian party** – An analysis of interviewees' views of the roles of subject associations in resistance.
5. **Compliance in the midst of resistance** – A brief analysis of Mary, the deviant case study, showing how her alienation from the subject community contributed to her compliance.

4.1 Identifying hegemony

As discussed above, hegemony works in part by aligning the interests of the powerful with a narrative of common sense. This process was clearly apparent in early discussions of the history curriculum in which Education Minister Michael Gove asserted confidently that, 'most parents would rather their children had a traditional education, with children sitting in rows, learning the kings and queens of England' (Gove, 2010b) and that children in England were being denied 'the opportunity to hear our island story' (Gove, 2010). To buttress these arguments, articles in the right-wing press argued that the previous Labour government had privileged leftist ideology over common sense. One such article in the *Daily Mail* made the wholly erroneous claim that 'The likes of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Nelson and Winston Churchill had been dropped from history lessons under the last Labour Government' (Petre, 2012).

While such appeals to common sense might have exercised some influence on the public at large, our history teachers were immune to such a discourse. Indeed, Chris was explicitly critical of common-sense notions of the curriculum – a view he referred to as a ‘*Daily Mail* agenda’. When asked to describe what he meant by this, his response was firmly rooted critiques of common sense,

...That you should be able to question any person in the street over the age of... 15 or whatever and they should be able to tell you 10 key facts about British history and if they don’t know those key facts then somehow they... haven’t been taught properly...

The phrase ‘person in the street’ could not speak more directly to common sense. In contrast, the participants in this study were unanimous that the common sense view that there exists a canon of facts that ‘everyone should know’ was inherently ideological. Developing his earlier critique, Chris felt that the curriculum was motivated principally by nationalism,

National values... are encouraged... so... [it’s] big on creating a citizen, creating patriotism, creating national values... I think teaching an island story with a chronological approach I would regard that as... to the right of centre.”

Anna expressed similar views, but her perspective was brought into sharper relief by the context in which she worked. She taught in a school in one of England’s largest cities which, according to Ofsted (the school’s inspectorate), has a “very high” proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and where “students originate from 59 different countries and speak more than 50 languages”. She was extremely sceptical of a curriculum which “glorifies Britain” and felt that it would alienate her students,

[I asked my children]... ‘How do you identify yourself?’... Not one said British, not one. So I need to make history engaging to our students in a sense that - yes they are in Britain - [But] this looks at Britain in isolation, this looks at Britain’s role in everything

Anna’s comment also allows us to see the relationship between common and good sense – she acknowledges the legitimacy of the common sense view ‘yes, they are in Britain’ before criticising a focus on ‘Britain in isolation’. The rejection of the singular narrative of the February draft focused not just on ethnic mono-culturalism, but on class too. In the words of Peter,

I think when you spend a huge amount of time looking at politicians and monarchs and, you know, empire builders, that to me goes back to the old history idea of a tiny, tiny percentage of the population... and it’s like well what about the experience of 96%, 97% of the population?

It would be tempting to see this as a fundamentally political criticism – Peter’s interest in the ‘97%’ recalls the then fashionable protest slogan of the ‘Occupy’ movement, ‘We are the 99%’ – but his is a historiographical, rather than a political criticism. It is an explicit rejection of what he describes as ‘the old idea of history’: a narrow constitutional history which concentrates on the experiences of elites. As we will see in the next section, Peter is here drawing support from the counter hegemonic discourse of ‘New History’ which is so crucial to a Gramscian interpretation of curriculum contestation.

4.2 Thinking against: New history as counter hegemony

Despite universal opprobrium for the new curriculum, respondents did not, at first, favour a strategy of open resistance. In common with the micro-political case-studies of resistance discussed earlier, many teachers’ initial response was to find ways to subvert or mediate the curriculum.

Describing her feelings when she first read the curriculum Anna said,

to put it bluntly I was gutted... I was thinking 'how am I going to teach this in a way where I can get the same thing out of my students [as before]?'

Those teachers working in academies (English state schools with additional autonomy) considered disregarding the draft completely.

I'm in an academy [and] the first thing my, my head of department did was look at it and go 'Well we might try and include some of it but if we don't, it's not end of the world'

Rebecca.

as an academy... we don't have to follow the National Curriculum and I certainly didn't intend to follow *that* National Curriculum

Eric.

As Education Secretary, Michael Gove had been a vocal supporter of both the new curriculum and increased autonomy for semi-privatised academy schools. There was, therefore, a certain irony in teachers seeking to use their new autonomy to disregard a curriculum which Gove, himself, had introduced. However, after considering such strategies of passive resistance or strategic compliance, the same teachers soon felt compelled to resist more openly.

[I thought] it doesn't affect me anyway. But then I started getting more involved in some of the things, like doing the HA surveys and stuff like that [and] I started thinking, 'Well if I hate it so much let's do something about it,'

Eric

[we completed] the consultation online, we had a departmental meeting in school time really where devoted to that the online document where everyone expressed their views. ...There was no question that we wouldn't do that; of course we would give our opinions online and we did it collectively in unison

Anna

This shift from passive resistance to active opposition is intriguing since it was made by teachers who were personally unaffected by the curriculum change. Anna feels a duty to oppose the draft ('there was no question that we wouldn't do that') while Eric feels compelled to 'do something about it' even though 'it doesn't affect me anyway'. There is, in these extracts, an implication in these extracts that these teachers feel that something larger than their own workload or job satisfaction at stake. The good sense of the counter-hegemonic discourse of history offers the theoretical insight guiding opposition and the ideological glue which permits a collective response. In this vein, Eric goes on to explain his criticism of the draft in more detail,

....it was just so old-fashioned highbrow history... like Trevelyan and stuff like that, where it was just all... you know, it was like political top end history. And these days now... it's like history's expanded and stretched so much into kind of social issues and social demands.

Eric contrasts the 'old-fashioned' history of the draft with what history is 'these days'. Here Eric is showing an awareness of the history of his own discipline. By referencing Trevelyan, he is criticising the draft as an example of the discredited Whig interpretation of history which was first criticised by Butterfield in 1931, but whose influence remained in university history faculties until the social history boom in the 1960s. Eric's critique – like Peter's above – is not, therefore, of the specific content of the draft, but of the outdated historiography which underpins it

While not all respondents were as explicit as Eric, all did reference the tradition of New History as an alternative to the curriculum-as-list approach taken in the draft. In short, teachers were offering a depoliticised disciplinary defence of the subject: the draft curriculum was criticised not as an ideologically-motivated artefact, but as 'bad history'. In this way, the counter hegemonic conception of history teaching has contributed to the creation of transformative intellectuals 'who combine scholarly reflection and practice in the service of educating students to be thoughtful active citizens' (Giroux, 1988, p. 122).

The significance of this can be seen in Chris's description of what he considers to be his approach to history teaching.

it's probably getting students to think... from a... I wouldn't even say two sided, multi sided perspective.... so that they are fully kind of trained for a world that often is quite intent to try and mislead people.

In stating that 'the world' is 'intent to try and mislead people', Chris is offering a rather crude description of hegemony. However, if his analysis of the 'problem' of hegemony is rudimentary, his prescription for challenging this is remarkably sophisticated. For Chris, the discipline of history affords children the ability to navigate and challenge hegemony, but it does not through direct opposition, but by bequeathing a multi-perspectival view of the world.

Here Chris makes an important point about what 'balance' means in history curricula. He references a common-sense view of 'balance' – that children should study 'both sides' – but he recognises that to frame 'balance' in these binary terms is to misrepresent the historical discipline. As a historian, Chris recognises that there are not - as common sense would have it - 'two sides' to every story, but an almost infinite number of 'perspectives'. This distinction matters because- as Tonkin (1990) shows - a 'two-sided' approach inevitably privileges a hegemonic account as 'orthodoxy' and its critiques as 'revisionism'. The discursive effect of these framings is to imbue the hegemonic account with a 'truthiness' that alternative interpretations lack. In this way, hegemony operates through this performative conception of objectivity which marginalises subaltern voices without silencing them completely. For Chris, it is the epistemic basis of the historical discipline which allows children to 'think against' hegemony, not the inclusion or exclusion of particular people or events.

Common sense does not necessarily have to be regressive in intent. Chris' Gramscian 'good sense' in this respect can be contrasted other progressive critiques which lack the theoretical insight that Chris offers. For example, a high-profile campaign by Operation Black Vote (OBV) demanded the inclusion of Victorian Jamaican-British nurse, Mary Seacole in the list of historical figures that children would study (Silvera, 2013). The argument offered by OBV was that the Seacole (who had been excluded from the approved list) played a similar role in the Crimean War to Florence Nightingale whose name had been included. In the interests of balance, OBV argued, Seacole's name should feature alongside Nightingale's. However, while this campaign was motivated by the admirable goal of including more minority figures on the approved list of content, in Gramscian terms it was partial and hence flawed. For Gramsci, counter-hegemonic critiques must have comparable explanatory power to the hegemony they oppose. While Chris' critique does this by questioning the epistemic illogicality of a 'two-sided' list, OBV's critique chose to argue the question of which persons should and should not be included on the 'approved list'. In so doing, OBV risked tacitly conceding the common sense view that the government has the right to compile such a list. The question of whether Nightingale 'balances' Seacole is, in Gramscian terms, a side issue; more critical is the question of whether and why such a list should exist at all. Chris' critique incorporates partial critiques of the curriculum (such as OBV's) but avoids the limitations of such single-issue campaigns.

The picture of teachers emerging here is one of a theoretically literate profession whose disciplinary and epistemic discourses allow them to speak with confidence about the curriculum. This picture seems to contradict the findings of a recent authoritative study which concluded,

[it] is clear in our data is that full-blown reflexively articulated confrontation between agonistic discourses is rare and fleeting... There is little space or time or opportunity to think differently or 'against' (Ball, et al., 2012, pp. 138-139)

While many teachers have lost the professional language to think differently, the teachers in this study possess a ready-made and fully-theorised counterhegemonic discourse which draws on a powerful – and current - shared vision of their subject discipline. In fact, a counterhegemonic vision had become embedded in their daily practice as part of their professional habitus, offering, in Brooks' words (2016), a 'professional compass' which guided their practice and their interactions with policy.

4.3 The will and the Gramscian war of position

For Gramsci, the formation of counter-hegemony under hegemonic conditions is an act of will: the ability to reconcile one's faith that a better world is possible with an honest appraisal of the objective situation. Resistance, therefore, requires a kind of benign cognitive dissonance; one which Gramsci captured in his famous aphorism, 'I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will' (Gramsci, 1993). Similarly, among the interviewees the conviction that resistance was an obligation co-existed with doubts that this resistance would be effective. Indeed, the eventual success of their resistance seemed to come as something of a shock:

'I'm surprised how much they caved to be quite honest!'
Chris

when the September [revised] curriculum came out, I was really taken aback, I was like, 'what? Really?' The two [draft and revised curricula] cannot be more different and it wasn't just like, 'okay we'll appease you, we'll put in a little bit of changes here and there', it's completely revolutionised the document...

Anna

Anna here captures the role of competing discourses within the Gramscian war of position. Gramsci was clear that the state could not be resisted through the dogmatic restatement of an established ideology. Instead, counter-hegemonic narratives had to adapt to remain relevant to both the masses and to the hegemony which it critiqued. Hegemony and counter-hegemony are therefore understood as locked in a discursive dialectic in which each absorbs and adapts the critique of the other. Anna shows herself to be acquainted with this interactive relationship in which hegemony 'appeases' its critics by making changes 'here and there', and unconsciously echoes Marx in contrasting this with the 'revolutionary' change that actually occurred.

This concept of a responsive ever-evolving counter hegemony is discernible in the field of history education. Just as Gramsci felt that elements of Marx's critique no longer applied to a Europe teetering on the precipice of Fascism, so the early arguments advanced by proponents of 'New History' in the 1970s no longer applied to curriculum wars in the 2000s. I have elsewhere (Smith, 2017) used the term 'discursive dancing' to describe this tendency of counter-hegemonic conceptions of 'good history' to evolve; however, these interviews offered the opportunity to explore this phenomenon from teachers' perspectives. Chris was explicitly critical of older instantiations of 'new history' and contended that New History had learned from the hegemonic emphasis on historical narrative:

I think [at first New History] got it wrong by too much source work. If you look at *Contrasts and Connections* [(Corbishley, et al., 1991)], there is no narrative or it's like 25 sources on a chapter it's a nightmare. I think they probably perhaps got that balance wrong but I think they've addressed that since.

In Chris's view, by admitting that early textbooks 'got the balance wrong', the discursive position of the counter-hegemonic discourse was strengthened. Another example of this discursive dexterity was offered by Anna who spoke about how the School's History Project (SHP) Conference¹ accommodated changes in government policy while maintaining its commitment to 'New History'. She gives an example of when, under the New Labour government (1997-2010), a renewed focus on basic skills (literacy and numeracy) framed much discussion on the curriculum, the history education community was able to adapt:

The ethos almost changes... it doesn't completely change but it latches onto what the latest developments are, so for example in the past two years if you look at the history conference..., a lot of it is literacy focussed, whereas that wouldn't be there five years ago...

Although it claims a continuous lineage stretching back to the early 1970s, New History is not a political critique 'in thrall to 1960s ideologies' as its critics would have it (Gove, 2013b), but a dynamic and fluid commitment to epistemically rigorous history teaching. As we have seen, this discourse serves two purposes: it affords, in Sachs' words, a unifying 'self-narrative' and 'glue for collective professional identity' (2003, p. 132) and also frames the terms in which critiques of hegemonic curricula are made. Having established both the nature of this critique and its efficacy, it remains only to explore the question of how such a counter-hegemonic conception is formed and how it can remain so responsive and relevant. To understand this, we must analyse the roles of history teaching subject associations as analogous to Gramsci's political parties.

4.4 Intellectualism and the Gramscian 'party'

As discussed earlier, Gramsci makes two observations about the political party. The first is the need for the party to embody the collective will of its membership; but this, in turn is dependent on the second: the need for leadership by 'organic intellectuals' rooted in the experience of the working class. Two very different organisations attend to these concerns within the English history teaching community. The first is the Historical Association (HA). Formed in 1906, the HA was granted a Royal Charter in 2006 and boasts close connections to elite university history faculties. These historic links to the British establishment confer considerable influence on the Historical Association and guarantee that its voice will be heard in the 'corridors of power'. However, with this profile necessarily comes a certain distance from ordinary classroom teachers. Bridging this gap is the SHP, a less formal organisation with no comparable tradition or establishment pedigree. The SHP grew out of the Schools' Council curriculum projects in the 1970s and now operates as a 'think tank' and textbook publishing brand. The SHP's major contribution to the history teaching community is its large national conference in July each year. This informal and participatory structure allows the SHP to remain in contact with 'ordinary' history teachers and to reflect their views.

To look first at the HA, Gramsci believed that the party was needed to unite the inevitably diffuse interests of capitalism's opponents into a single counter-hegemonic programme. Anna gave an eloquent account of the interaction between the HA (qua political party) and the mass of its membership,

¹ This large conference of teachers working in the New History tradition takes place in Leeds in July each year. It takes its name from the 'Schools History Project' which, as the Schools Council for History Project, promoted New History in the 1970s.

if it was just a few people at the top [the HA], disagreeing ...Michael Gove [would say] 'well I'm not listening to you am I, I'm doing what I'm doing anyway'. But in this case it was the people at the top, accompanied by a huge grassroots level of teachers who were like 'this document, as it stands, cannot be effective' ... Everyone had same goal, everyone believed in the same outcome which was to change the curriculum and because everyone was united, that's how it was able to happen. The pressure was too much.

Although Anna clearly esteems the 'people at the top' she believes that the HA exercises its influence mainly because it speaks for the 'grassroots'. However, she is similarly clear that sheer weight of numbers and righteous anger would not have been able to effect change on its own,

I: Could it have happened without the HA by sheer force of numbers?
 Anna: Um, that's an interesting thing, I personally don't believe it could. If it would have happened [it] may not have been such a sophisticated response or such a tidy one, almost. They tied all the knots for us at the top.

The Historical Association is here conceived as doing something more than simply representing its members' views, it is reformulating them and making them more 'sophisticated' and 'tidy'. In doing so, the multiplicity and variance in members' views is unified as a singular coherent message is propounded by the party. Such unity is, as Gramsci realised, a double-edged sword. While valuable in ensuring that criticism is focused, too great an emphasis on 'unity' can lead to intolerance of dissent. As Gramsci realised, if the new party is to avoid the undemocratic fate of the Jacobins or Bolsheviks, it needs a mechanism for hearing and incorporating the diverse voices of its membership. To achieve this, Gramsci argued for leadership by 'organic intellectuals' rooted in the day-to-day experience of the working class. These 'organic intellectuals' would retain the credibility that comes with understanding the 'situation on the ground', but they would also be 'intellectuals'; that is, informed by good – rather than 'common' sense. For Gramsci, this is a unique form of representation in which legitimacy is daily renewed rather than bestowed by appointment or election. The need for this permanent renewal of legitimacy is summed up by Gramsci when he writes,

The mode of being a new intellectual can no longer exist in eloquence, which is a.... momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life... as a 'permanent persuader' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10).

While it is difficult to conceive of how this system of permanent accountability might work in practice, the structure of the SHP offers a satisfactory exemplar. When asked to describe what the SHP was, Rebecca saw it as both 'party' and community:

the main figure... [is] [names the Director]. He seems to be one of the most important characters in putting together the conference as well as all the other stuff that SHP do, but I also think then that they've got a collection of people that are there that play an important part in making sure that the conference runs. Not only the SHP fellows, but those people that are willing to put on workshops there; that are willing to show what they've been doing over that past year that they think is worth sharing. I think that holds it together: having somewhere to go. I also think fundamentally that if teachers have committed to delivering this stuff and if teachers want to ensure that we are part of the community, that it's our desire to attend these conferences that makes them so effective because it's okay having the SHP fellows there, it's alright having sessions being run, but you're nowhere then if people don't attend. So I think fundamentally it's something that comes from within the teaching community that makes them want to be part of something bigger and be part of a wider community.

For Rebecca, accountability, legitimacy and transparency are founded in participation and engaged consent, rather than traditional and established notions of representation. The theme of 'community' features prominently in her response; the role of the leadership is acknowledged, but is soon superseded by an emphasis on ordinary members. For Rebecca, it is teachers' 'desire to attend these conferences' which confers legitimacy and ensures the community's longevity.

In its two subject associations, the history teaching community is represented by 'parties' which manifest the two Gramscian virtues of unity and representation. Much existing research on subject associations views them as essentially conservative organisations (Knight, 1996; Goodson, 1983; Goodson, 1988) which defend their subject's curricular prominence by appealing to the academic traditionalism of politicians and elites. However, in the case presented here, two subject associations co-exist and act as both representative and participatory democracies, engaging with ordinary teachers, incorporating their views and finessing a critique which can be mobilised in periods of curriculum contestation. History teachers derive two benefits from these organisations: the knowledge that their views will be properly represented and the protection of an intellectual tradition on which they can call during periods of curriculum contestation. It is this community, constantly active during an unceasing war of *position*, which challenges hegemony so effectively during the inevitable curricular wars of *manoeuvre*.

4.5 Compliance in the midst of resistance

The use of deviant case-study makes it possible to test the strengths and limitations of the preceding Gramscian analysis. Mary had a Resistance Score of 0 and like other interviewees expressed a preference for strategic compliance in the face of curriculum change. However, unlike Anna, Rebecca and Eric, Mary never made the shift from initial compliance to open opposition. Mary offers two reasons for her inaction: her isolation from the history teaching community (which for her is both physical and local) and a discomfort with electronic media.

I don't really come into contact with very many other history teachers these days so
I don't know.... what's out there

[...]

If you were to ask me to go online and do it I'd be going yeah okay and then I'd find something else to do, if you actually sent me something in the post, I know that's awful but I'm really, if you actually send me something I'm more likely to fill it in ... so I'd say it's a bit of laziness and a bit of, bit of apathy and a bit of 'Make it a bit more easy for me to do it'.

These two reasons are, of course, interlinked; since it is largely through electronic communication that opposition to the draft was both mobilised and sustained (see Smith, 2017). In reading the account of someone who feels isolated from the community, the sense that community identity is important to resistance is reinforced. Mary's account does, however, suggest that the medium for sharing counter-hegemonic discourses might be as important as the discourses themselves.

5. Conclusion

Much research on teacher resistance concentrates on the micro-political level of mediation and enactment; this paper, in contrast, offers a case-study of ordinary teachers critiquing and resisting policy at a macro-level. It is, of course, noted that in many countries, the space for curriculum contestation at this macro-level does not exist. The temptation for governments to exercise control over the curriculum (particularly the history curriculum) is strong and, in these jurisdictions,

subversion and mediation at the micro-level remain the only viable forms of resistance. However, the analysis offered here suggests that where macro-level opposition is possible, the confidence to resist at the policy level is born of conviction that one's analysis of the situation is both better-informed and more assuredly articulated than one's opponents. Such a confidence does not come naturally, and nor does it happen overnight. Instead, the shared counter-hegemonic narratives which confer this confidence must be fostered within a democratic community over the course of several decades.

Two factors act on this counter-hegemony to ensure its relevance and precision: the external critiques offered by a 'war of position' with hegemony and the internal critiques encouraged by organic intellectuals within subject associations. Existing research which laments the lack of a theoretically-informed discourse of teacher resistance might look at this case-study and the affordances of a strong subject community and associated teacher-identity. For too long, school subjects have been associated with conservatism or tribalism (Becher & Trowler, 2001), rather than possible sites of informed resistance. However, while these discourses of resistance are not immediately accessible, this paper suggests that careful and collective introspection about the nature of one's subject is the *sine qua non* of successful resistance of unwelcome curriculum change.

The claims made by this paper are fairly modest. This paper does not claim that Gramsci provides a generalizable formula for effective curriculum resistance, nor does it suggest that such a microcosmic example can be extrapolated to support Gramsci's political theories. Instead, it suggests that important concepts from Gramsci's political philosophy – particularly the need for a sophisticated and fluid counter-hegemonic critique – might offer an analytical heuristic for researching future instances of curriculum contestation and, indeed, the question of why such resistance is so often absent.

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