

Consent, coercion and evidence-based policy: Establishing a hegemony in post-truth times

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Evidence-based policy, practice and its associated discourses have become a powerful hegemonic force in Victorian education in recent years. Drawing on interviews with practicing teachers and critical discourse analysis of policy texts, this paper considers the rationales underpinning the evidence-based policy movement and teachers' perspectives on its role in their work, using Antonio Gramsci's (1971) writing on the relationship between consent, coercion and the maintenance of cultural hegemony. Gramsci's (1971) perspective on consent and coercion offers that 'force and consent are simply equivalent' (p. 271); a view this paper considers useful to understanding the implementation of evidence-based policy, and its ascension to an infallible, hegemonic position in teaching practice. This paper suggests that in an educational context, this relationship between coercion, consent and hegemony is underpinned by discourses of 'what works', 'impact' and 'improvement-focussed approaches', that carry the implicit weight and power of shared cultural understandings of these concepts. Further, it argues that school-based accountability mechanisms surveilling teachers' adoption and use of aspects of the 'evidence-based' paradigm create the illusion of a 'popular consent' (Murray & Worth, 1971, p. 733) among teachers, despite some of them holding reservations about its efficacy. Finally, this paper places the inclination for evidence-based practice in the context of the post-truth era, arguing that the conditions of this moment have created a preoccupation with certainty and assurance in teaching policy and practice.