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Review of César Augusto Rossatto's *Engaging Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of Possibility: From Blind to Transformative Optimism*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005

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Rossatto's book is an effort to extend and apply the work of Freire by looking at the practices around time consciousness in two educational settings. Time consciousness is considered a hegemonic practice wherein the dominant understanding is imposed on alternative time practices utilized by marginalized groups. For those who have studied the issues of cultural conceptions of time and space—for example, the work by David Harvey or Henri Lefebvre—Rossatto's conception of time seems quite narrow. By time consciousness he instead seems to be referring to the way in which students conceive of the capacity of social change in the future.

Rossatto utilizes four conceptualizations to reflect the different ways students appreciate change: blind optimism, resilient optimism, fatalist optimism, and transformative optimism. Blind optimism shies away from examining the balances of power and is indicative of students who are oblivious to conditions that prevent consciousness of self-determination. Resilient optimists assume that transformation is possible at the individual level and reflects hope about larger social change. The fatalist optimist recognizes the problem of unequal power yet displays no hope for the capacity to create change. Transformative optimists have an understanding of the capacity of social change through collective action and feel strongly hopeful about the future. Thus Rossatto regards schools as "sites where individualistic notions of optimism hegemonically construct the learning context, excluding and disenfranchising the notions of marginalized groups and their allies" (23).

He further asks whose interests are served under the various constructions of time/optimism. In blind optimism he places narratives about "individual hard work" and "meritocracies." Fatalistic optimism, he argues, creates alienation and a self-fulfilling prophecy where students withdraw from the process. Resilient optimism is manifested, he suggests, in conforming to the normative order. It creates optimism, but students are called to deny their cultural origins to become successful. Only in transformative optimism can we see the formation of collective resistance against social processes that produce alienating realities and conduce to a liberated future. Thus Rossatto concludes

that educators should focus on developing educational strategies that build transformative optimism.

In examining these matters, Rossatto spent time in two schools, one in the slums of Rio de Janeiro and one in inner city Los Angeles. Within each site, principals arranged for Rossatto to visit one “low achieving” and one “high achieving ” 9th grade classroom (approximately 24-35 in each group, giving a total of 115 students). Both a quantitative survey was administered as well as a series of open-ended interviews and observations. The data were collected and organized into profiles of low and high achieving students. (The admitted focus of the study is disenfranchised adolescent urban students.) Although all were disenfranchised, half were high achieving.

Surprisingly, the results of the survey are presented in only three pages. The basic summary is that low achieving students were more inclined to be fatalistic and high achieving students were more inclined to display resilient optimism—which raises one of my first methodological questions concerning the book. The categories are presented as if they were inductively derived from the data but there is no clear explanation for how the analytic work came to that conclusion. At the same time, if the categories were deductively defined, there is no clear explanation of how they were operationalized within the survey instrument. The categories are given at face value only. Rossatto states that the “patterns emerged from the data analysis,” and did so “[w]ithin a Freirean perspective” (45). Yet the conceptualization/interpretation process remains unspecified. Moreover, the overly brief summary of the survey data limits what can be gleaned from the work.

Subsequently, each pattern of optimism is explored in its own chapter based on the qualitative data. However, what is presented comes across as a theoretical discussion of the concept, followed by “for instance” stories. At one point, Rossatto writes,

In one incident, I observed and videotaped a young and relatively inexperienced teacher in the Los Angeles LA [low achieving] group silencing and avoiding a discussion of racial issues raised by one student. Both the teacher and the student were African American, and the student was obviously disturbed by this experience. The clear implication of the teacher’s avoidance of the subject was that this was not an appropriate subject. (53)

In this case, as in most of the examples, the level of description does not help the reader really know what occurred. I have to rely on his secondhand summary and his conclusions, which largely inferred motive. Such a methodology recurred throughout the chapters. In no place did I feel as if there were a clear presentation of the data research.

Finally, the book gathers an odd assortment of other material. One section is devoted to a transcript of a discussion between the author and Paulo Freire. One chapter applies the four categories of optimism to the issue of standardized testing in the U.S. Another discusses the theoretical implications of the categories on several literatures, including children’s development, studies on the concept of time, the “centeredness” of school pedagogy, and critical pedagogies.

In the end, I feel a bit of remorse for not finding more to recommend about the work. I was excited to read the book given my interest in alternative education models, especially those disclosed within and informed by the work of Paulo Freire. But I found the book methodologically frustrating and logically murky. Even so, Rossatto’s discussions of various literatures were very interesting. His general observations about

critical pedagogy and education as a tool of social action were inspirational, but the book didn't hold together well as a research study.