

## BOOK REVIEW

**Bozalek, Vivienne, Leibowitz, Brenda, Carolissen, Ronelle & Boler, Megan (Eds.) (2013). *Discerning Critical Hope in Educational Practices*. London and New York: Routledge**

Denise Wood\*

Paulo Freire, regarded as one of the most influential educators of the 20th century, proclaimed in *Pedagogy of Hope* that hope is an ontological need, which “demands an anchoring in practice” (Freire, 1994, p. 2). The kind of hope that Freire was referring to was not a naïve hope that is “subjectively idealistic” (Freire, 1970, p. 129), but rather, critical hope fostered through a radical pedagogy combining “hope, critical reflection and collective struggle” (Giroux, 1985, p. xvii). Similarly, Giroux (2003) spoke of “educated hope”, noting the need to combine the discourse of critique and hope in ways that lead to critical activity, and opens up the possibility for social change. Freire’s pedagogy of hope is thus a transformative pedagogy, one that challenges didactic styles of instruction that relegate the student to a passive vessel to be filled with content (what Freire referred to as the “banking concept of education”, 1970, p. 74) and seeks to awaken students’ critical consciousness and awareness of power relations through a dialogic relationship with the teacher. Such a transformative pedagogy involves more than simply empowering students. Through their collaborative roles as “co-investigators in dialogue” (Freire, 1970, p. 81), both teachers and students are transformed. Feminist scholar and social activist Bell Hooks refers to such a transformative approach as an “engaged pedagogy”, one in which teachers transform their curriculum and their teaching practices to sites of resistance that challenge the biases and systems of domination that perpetuate inequalities and oppression in a neo-liberal society (Hooks, 1994).

*Discerning critical hope in educational practices* builds on the work of these revolutionary scholars through an edited collection, responding to Freire’s call for a pedagogy of hope: the type of educated hope referred to by Giroux and the transformative teaching practice advocated by Hooks. The edited collection achieves this ambitious goal through the skilful synthesis of theory, critique and praxis interwoven in a four-part volume addressing critical hope in education, a critique of neoliberalism, postcolonial perspectives on critical hope, and a historical account of the emancipatory potential of critical hope. As Michael Apple in his foreword to the book argues, the individual chapters in *Discerning critical hope in educational practices* build upon each other in a way that exposes the “multiple relations of

---

\* Professor of Learning, Equity Access and Participation, Central Queensland University, Australia.  
Email: d.wood@cqu.edu.au.

exploitation, domination, and subordination – and multiple political projects that interrupt these relations in education and the larger society” (Apple, 2013, p. xvii). Importantly, as Apple observes, the authors in the book describe their pedagogical approaches to engaging in transformative practices through critical pedagogy involving “participatory inquiry and dialogue” (Bozalek *et al.*, 2013, p. 2), which seeks to foster the conditions for critical hope and social change.

Part I of *Discerning critical hope in educational practices* focuses on critical hope in education. In Chapter 2, Michalinas Zembylas reinforces Freire’s distinction between naïve and critical hope, arguing for a pedagogical approach involving “critical emotional praxis”; a pedagogy of critical hope that combines affective, ethical and political perspectives through critique and action. Zembylas provides a tangible example of what he means by critical emotional praxis through a vignette describing the strategies undertaken by a teacher in Cyprus as she sought to engage in intercultural pedagogical practices that aimed to address discrimination and stereotypes against migrant students. Megan Boler continues the theme of critical hope and the role of emotions in Chapter 2 through her discussion of the “pedagogy of discomfort”, an approach that engages students in critical reflection about their assumptions, emotional reactions and responses to reveal unconscious privilege and complicity with the dominant ideology. Boler makes the point that such a pedagogy focuses not only on the dominant group, but also to members of marginalised cultures. In the final chapter of Part I, Bozalek, Carolissen and Leibowitz build on the foundations laid by Zembylas and Boler in the preceding chapters, describing the strategies they employed for embedding critical hope in educational practice through a course undertaken by students enrolled in two historically differently placed higher education institutions (HEIs) within the South African context. Despite the positive outcomes reported by the authors, the challenges and resistances are also discussed to highlight the importance of critical hope being understood as an iterative and ongoing process.

The three chapters that comprise Part II focus on critical hope through a critique of neoliberalism. In Chapter 4, Gustavo Fischman and Eric Haas argue for discourses of hope that go beyond progressive pedagogies characterised by “narratives of redemption” (the view that sees teachers as “superheroes”). André Keet continues the critique of neoliberalism in Chapter 5 by problematising approaches to human rights education that work against the critical, arguing for engagement with the concepts of “plasticity” and “deconstruction” linked to a critique of human rights education. The final chapter in Part II by Henk van Rinsum draws on the Freirean concepts of critical hope and radical transformation through a deconstruction of the HOPE project of the University of Stellenbosch as means of demonstrating the need for institutions to engage in critical self-examination at every level in order to bring about change.

Part III provides postcolonial perspectives on critical hope through contributions by three authors who in their respective chapters describe the transformative potential of a critical hope anchored in praxis in the struggle against racism and as a means for

overcoming colonial domination. In Chapter 7, Ronald David Glass draws on his own personal history in critiquing what he describes as the false hopes that have limited the social and political commitments of white antiracism educators in the USA. Glass invokes the Freirean concept of critical hope as an ontological need in highlighting the importance of critical hope in supporting the struggles for justice and a means of overcoming despair associated with the persistence of oppression. Paul Warmington continues the discussion of the transformative potential of critical hope anchored in praxis in Chapter 8 through his account of the black education movements in the UK. Warmington argues that such movements need to be based on a critical hope that is historically grounded, while at the same time informed by universal ideals of transformative education. Merylyne Cruz's chapter on decolonising education, informed by her own journey as a critical Filipino feminist concludes Part III. Through her account, Cruz employs a reflexive performance counter-narrative of the self as a form of decolonising writing. The final section of the book provides philosophical overviews of critical hope through John Horton's historical account of the emancipatory role of critical hope. In her afterword, Mary Zournazi reflects on the affective dimensions of critical hope and the importance of gratitude as an ethical relation between people.

Taken together, the papers comprising this edited collection build on each other in providing diverse perspectives based on the authors' experiences in varying geographical contexts in which the challenges that educators face in their quest for achieving critical hope in their teaching reflect the differences marking each site's historical and contemporary conditions. The diversity of voices and social contexts represented in the book thus provide and demand of the reader a "multi-faceted interrogation of the notion of critical hope" (Bozalek *et al.*, 2013, p. 4). Through its focus on critical hope anchored in praxis, this edited collection provides an accessible resource that can guide educators in applying the principles of critical hope to their classroom practices in ways that can begin to realise the goals of transformative pedagogy. At the same time, the authors' accounts reveal the challenges associated with what Apple describes as "counter-hegemonic actions in education theory and practice" (Apple, 2013, p. xvii).

This book does not offer simple solutions for overcoming despair, which so often accompanies the struggle for transformation in education and the work for social justice. As Apple in his foreword to the book reminds us, the task of challenging dominant ideologies is hard work; there are no easy solutions. However, the contributions in this edited collection do provide educators with strategies for transformative action based on a critical hope fostered through critical reflection, critique and praxis. As such, *Discerning critical hope in educational practices* is in many ways unfinished, since critical hope is "an ongoing process involving constant re-evaluation and revision for renewal and sustained critique" (Bozalek, 2013, p. 2). As Apple (2013) identifies, critical hope and the work of the engaged educator is therefore a project that is never finished and is always becoming (p. xvii).

## References

- Apple, M. (2013). Foreword: Hope in a time of crisis. In V. Bozalek, B. Leibowitz, R. Carolissen, & M. Boler, M. (Eds), *Discerning critical hope in educational practices* (pp. xiv-xxii). London and New York: Routledge.
- Bozalek, V., Leibowitz, B., Carolissen, R., & Boler, M. (2013). Introduction. In V. Bozalek, B. Leibowitz, R. Carolissen, & M. Boler, M. (Eds), *Discerning critical hope in educational practices* (pp. 1-8). London and New York: Routledge.
- Bozalek, V., Leibowitz, B., Carolissen, R., & Boler, M. (Eds). (2013). *Discerning critical hope in educational practices*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed* (R. R. Barr, Trans.). London, New Dehli, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramon, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Giroux, H. (2003). Utopian thinking under the sign of neoliberalism: Towards a critical pedagogy of educated hope. *Democracy & Nature*, 9(1), 91-105.
- Giroux, H. (1985). Introduction. In P. Freire (Ed.), *The politics of education: Culture, power and liberation* (pp. xi-xxvi). Westport: Bergin & Garvey.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (Vol. 4). New York: Routledge.