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Book review

Book review: *The Pedagogy of Radical Change: Social movements, resistance and alternative futures in higher education and society,* by Spyros Themelis

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In his powerful and timely book *The Pedagogy of Radical Change*, Spyros Themelis presents an urgent and hopeful account of how education can act not only as a site of resistance but as a space for imagining and prefiguring more just worlds. Drawing on rich empirical work across Brazil, Chile, Greece and Britain, Themelis explores the intersections of social movements and education in the context of global neoliberal capitalism. Central to his analysis is the concept of *pluriversal pedagogies*, an approach that embraces epistemic diversity and the relational, affective and political dimensions of learning. It challenges monocultural, Western-centric knowledge systems and instead foregrounds alternative ways of knowing and acting in the world.

The book is deeply rooted in critical theory, decolonial thought and radical pedagogy. The influence of Paulo Freire is evident, not only in the attention to praxis and consciousness raising, but in the ethical stance the book takes towards education as a political, relational and hopeful act (see for example Freire, 1970). Themelis also draws on Boaventura de Sousa Santos's (2014) work on epistemologies of the South and on thinkers from diverse traditions who challenge the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems. However, what distinguishes this book is not only its theoretical richness, but also its unwavering commitment to hope as a political act.

The book is organised into seven chapters, each focusing on a different thematic and geographical dimension of radical pedagogy. After a theoretical framing in Chapters 1–3, Chapters 4–7 focus on a national context in Brazil, Chile, Greece and Britain, while Chapter 8 brings these insights together in a concluding reflection. Each chapter combines case study analysis with rich theoretical engagement, allowing Themelis to build a coherent and comparative narrative of pluriversal pedagogies across diverse contexts.

The writing is elegant, accessible and engaged. Themelis combines academic rigour with deep empathy, allowing the voices of activists, students, educators and communities to emerge authentically. For example, in Chapter 6, he examines how Greek students mobilised against austerity policies during the debt crisis, resisting university closures and the commodification of education. These protests were not just acts of defiance but pedagogical spaces, where new collective imaginaries and democratic practices were being rehearsed and enacted.

His comparative case study approach, covering grassroots student movements, decolonial university initiatives and transnational struggles, highlights both the specificities of local contexts and the shared global dynamics of resistance. Each case is carefully situated within a broader framework of capitalist restructuring, educational commodification and the crisis of democracy.

Ranging from Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement to Chilean student protests and decolonial curriculum efforts in Britain, the author reveals how each national context experiences what he terms a *crisis of democracy*. In Brazil, this manifests through violent dispossession and authoritarianism; in Greece, through imposed austerity and erosion of public institutions; in Chile, through privatisation and inequality in access to education; and in Britain, through increasing surveillance and marketisation in higher education. Despite their differences, these contexts share a common thread: the undermining of democratic participation, which Themelis argues is being countered through radical pedagogical interventions.

Yet *The Pedagogy of Radical Change* does more than document resistance. It offers a vision. Themelis foregrounds the concept of *prefigurative politics*, that is, creating in the present the forms of social relations and educational practices that we wish to see in the future (Yates, 2015). These are not abstract ideals; they are embodied practices that emerge in communities, assemblies, classrooms and movements. Chapter 4, for example, provides insight into Brazilian educators who integrate land struggles with dialogical teaching, cultivating what Themelis calls *pedagogies of dignity and persistence*. These are radical pedagogies not only because they resist, but because they imagine otherwise.

Themelis refuses this fatalism. His book is not naive, but it is unapologetically hopeful. It reminds us that collective agency exists, that people across the world are building alternatives, often quietly, often in the margins, and that these practices matter. Of course, the book does not claim that these movements are flawless or without internal contradictions but they show us what it means to resist, to reimagine and to rebuild. Nor does it present pluriversal pedagogies as a ready-made solution. In fact, one of its strengths is its willingness to sit with complexity. Still, some readers may wish for a deeper discussion of the methodological tensions involved in conducting comparative research across such different geopolitical sites. The theoretical framing of *pluriversal pedagogy*, while compelling, might also benefit from more elaboration on how these pedagogies can be translated into formal institutional settings or policy spaces.

As an educator and sociologist of education, I found myself deeply moved by the pedagogical insights that emerge throughout the book. While reading, I recalled recent moments in my own teaching, small but significant, where students were invited not only to analyse injustice, but also to feel it, to sit with it and to imagine how things could be otherwise. In those moments, learning became relational, embodied and ethical (Zembylas, 2015). This is exactly the kind of learning that Themelis champions: one that engages both the head and the heart, one that encourages care, reflexivity and responsibility.

Reading the final pages of the book prompted a personal reflection on the role of education in a time of genocide, a reflection that did not emerge from the text itself, but from the emotions and

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questions it stirred within me. As I closed the book, I found myself thinking: we are witnessing the destruction of Palestinian life in Gaza in real time. We scroll through images of unimaginable suffering. We hear the voices. And too often, we remain silent – or numb. What does it mean to be an educator in such a world? What is the purpose of knowledge if it does not move us?

The Pedagogy of Radical Change does not offer easy answers. But it does offer direction. It reminds us that pedagogy is not neutral. That how and what we teach shapes how people see, feel and act in the world. Themelis writes not from above, but from alongside, positioning himself as a researcher, a listener and a participant in ongoing struggles. His work is grounded, politically committed and deeply human.

This book will be of great value to postgraduate students, early career researchers and established scholars working in education, sociology and global studies, as it offers a rigorous yet accessible analysis of social movements and radical pedagogy rooted in comparative empirical research. It will also resonate with educators, community organisers and activists who seek to understand and engage with transformative practices in education. Through its vivid case studies, ethical stance and emphasis on hope and prefigurative politics, the book becomes not simply a text to be studied, but a companion for thinking, teaching and acting in difficult times.

More than anything, this book helped me remember something I sometimes forget: that change is possible. That even in the face of systemic violence and profound uncertainty, we are not powerless. That education, when rooted in solidarity, justice and care, can still make a difference.

In that sense, *The Pedagogy of Radical Change* is a radical book not only because it critiques structures of oppression, but because it dares to imagine otherwise. And that, today, is revolutionary.

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