

DINIZ-PEREIRA, JÚLIO EMÍLIO, HOW THE DREAMERS ARE BORN - STRUGGLES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF ACTIVIST EDUCATORS IN BRAZIL. (SERIES: EDUCATION AND STRUGGLE - VOLUME 2). ISBN 978-1-4331-2089-3 238PP. NEW YORK, BERN, BERLIN, BRUXELLES, FRANKFURT AM MAIN, OXFORD, WIEN, PETER LANG, 2013.

Holger Nord*

Looking at the title of the book and its key nouns “dreamers”, “struggles”, “justice” and “educators”, one is likely to expect another academic outcry against the unfair and exploitative nature of the world, in which idealists continue their futile struggle to change the unchangeable. As a result, one might be ready to toss it on the ever growing pile of self-defeating socialist and left-wing literature in education that only offers continuous lament with a mix of repetitive radical slogans. These usually sound rather shallow and archaic when echoing through the void of pragmatic steps and concrete positive results.

Diniz presents a rigid, clear and powerful counter narrative to the neo-liberal, consumer-oriented, and individualistic way of life. He offers not only great theoretical insight but also a research that introduces concrete ways of transformation that should inspire and even change the educational practice of anyone who draws on critical pedagogy and social transformation. Maybe a different title, such as “*What Happens To Assured Dreams? Teaching and learning for social transformation*” might have been more fitting.

Nevertheless, this book covers a vast theoretical and historical ground without

losing its focus and academic rigour. Diniz explores the identities of some of the activist educators within the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra - Landless Rural Workers Movement), in Brazil. Through his qualitative data and critical narrative analysis he is able to present a very intimate and relatable inquiry that portraits and personalises the complexities of a political struggle within educational initiatives. Diniz’ research is driven by the challenge of finding out about educational practitioners, i.e., dreamers, and their histories and identity constructions within the context of the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brazil (MST). At the same time, the chapters unearth a variety of insights and questions that go beyond the Brazilian context, and generate a more concrete and pragmatic approach of critical pedagogy, social subversive practice against the dominance of neo-liberal and capitalist discourse.

As a result, this publication offers a valuable understanding and a convincing example of qualitative research design that should inform academics and researchers alike. At the same time, the personalisation of this research within the area of education deserves a wider readership, ranging from

*Area Manager at VSL – Southeast. Email: holger.nord@gmail.com

critical pedagogues to teachers who feel disillusioned by the lack of impact of their practice and of schools in general.

Diniz follows the standard structure of an academic research thesis: establishing its relevance, context, justifying the methodology, introducing the research and discussing the findings and the scope of the results with further research prospects.

1. Introduction of the MST
2. The role of teaching, teachers and education in the MST
3. The tool of critical life history inquiry
4. The profile of the interviewees as educators
5. The characteristics of their identities – findings of the research
6. The MST and its influence on the educators
7. Research results and its scope for further inquiries

However, behind each academic titles are provoking, inspiring and practical insights which could be phrased in a different set of titles such as these:

1. *Without Land - Without Dignity* – forms of living as political action toward socio-political transformations
2. *Struggle* – life's most important teacher
3. A researcher's trepidations – from *testimonios* to collective truth(s)
4. *Toward becoming free as a human being* - Identity constructions as activist educators
5. *Don't see individual failure but structural injustice* - From indignation to contestation to transformation

6. The power of collective practice – wider worldview, bigger dreams and greater transformation

7. *To be continued*: Identities, practice, context – other education programs for social transformation with/in counter socio-political movements

These titles contain important findings of Diniz' work and show the political pragmatism as an important framework of action which, in itself, generates a specific pedagogical and methodological agenda. Furthermore, it appears that collectivity is a vital linchpin in the construction and experience of the socio-political reality, here called struggle, leading to a more potential and far-reaching collective practice, i.e., establishment of counter culture and greater subversive power.

While his findings are succinct, pragmatic and of general relevance, Diniz does not shy away from the public acknowledgment of the dilemmas and shortcomings of his own research, in particular in the selection of the interviewed, time and resource constraints. His procedure and strategies ensure strong validity and consistency, ranging from greater ownership for the participants through participation in the transcribing processes, co-editing of his translations, and greater authority of his findings through an interwoven literature review.

Throughout this book the author promotes his understanding of identity as a concept that it is “always under construction” (190), while he sees educational practice as an integrated socio-political activity as a wholistic endeavour, working “in all dimensions of the human being” (208), and that the activist educator “remains involved with the joys and sorrows of the community the whole time” (208). It is the MST, the

movement that is the principal educating force, whereas the educators are simply the facilitators, as well as the students due to their life within it, and their commitment to the MST.

Diniz deliberately provides a lot of discursive space for his interviewees, which allows the reader to get a greater close-up into the educators' lives and their own personal stories. At the same time the author continues to expose and embrace the complexities and challenges of the MST, not only showing its multi-facet character of a national movement but also tying it to his approach of critical narrative life-story inquiry. Unlike 'ahistorical' and 'objective' quantitative data, his findings, concepts and raw data are clearly dependent on the socio-political and historical contexts, assuming points of view. Despite these complexities, Diniz manages to focus on essential qualities. This allows him to sketch broad strokes of identity constructions to the point that general pragmatic approaches/strategies could be tested in other parts of the world.

Interestingly, one of Diniz' weaknesses, the rather small selection of literature, in particular critical literature regarding the evaluation of MST, works in his favour, since it enables him to focus on major points of the characteristics of MST, achieving clarity in his critical historical overview. Caldart's evaluation of the MST and its activists serves him as further validation of his own findings, e.g. the collective self-teaching (188). However, I must note that the heterogeneity of the MST appears to be contrasted with a less differentiated outside world, thus historical events appear a little dichotomised in order to emphasise the particularities of the movement. In addition, it might have been even more engaging if the reader could have had access to parts of the original transcript with all its

pauses, laughter and interjections, allowing the participation into the construction of the identities of the educators.

Overall, Diniz has presented a rare astute portrait of educational initiative that not only openly challenges the discourse and structures of the global neo-liberal orientation but describes in many ways a successful model that is feasible and worthwhile to be continued. As such, this book manages to provide not only ideas but also pragmatic strategies that challenge the omnipresence of capitalist structures, hierarchies and exploitations.

Diniz' book inspires the critical pedagogue to continue the socialist dream at a time when very often 'common sense' lures us into apathy because of dominating discourses that sterilize pedagogical activism and seek to push educational practices safely away from any concrete political or historical context. The author not only presents us with dreamers of a better world and a teaching toward social transformation but in his analysis we feel as these activist colleagues do; it does not have to become a dream deferred, but rather it can become a dream lived – live and teach toward it immediately.