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Tiramonti, G., & Filmus, D. (2001). *Sindicalismo docente y reforma en América Latina (Teachers' Unions and Reform in Latin America)* (1 ed.). Buenos Aires, Argentina: Temas Grupo Editorial.

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Introduction

Book's relevance to educational researchers

Current and ongoing educational reforms have changed the nature of the state-education relationship; however, current analyses of the relationship often do not take into consideration the important role of teachers' unions in these processes of change. This book furthers an understanding of the state-education relationship by focusing on this often-overlooked "object of analysis." The outcome is a wealth of empirical data on teachers' unions.

Overview

Beginning in the 1990s, economic and educational restructuring began to have an effect on the consensual agreement (Note 1) between Latin America's teachers' unions and the state. The editors of *Teachers' unions and reform in Latin America* (2001) (www.editorialtemas.com) suggest that consensus must be reconstructed and renegotiated in order to improve and continue to develop Latin American

educational systems, and concomitantly Latin American democratic societies. The four loosely related research projects in this compilation provide an in-depth look at teachers' unions so that cooperative ties between the state and teachers unions may be reconstructed (11).

There are endless possible objectives that could be attended to within a book titled *Teachers' Unions and Latin American Reform*. Fortunately, the editors offer two general objectives in their brief (four page) introduction. First, the compilation broadens an understanding of the region's teachers' unions. Three of the four chapters (Murillo, de Ibarrola and Loyo, and Tiramonti) expand current understanding of this particular collective organization in the Latin American context, focusing on current research regarding unions, organizational structures of unions, and the logic behind union responses to educational reforms in the 1990s, respectively.

Second, the compilation offers "a reflection on the relationship between a consensual agreement and [Latin American] countries' political and educational needs (13)." (Note 2) Chapters by Filmus, Murillo, and Tiramonti's address this objective. Filmus' methodical development of the concepts of "educational agreement" and "democratic governance" provide the conceptual framework for the other two chapters.

Review structure

This review provides a brief overview of the four chapters in the order they are arranged in the book (Filmus; Murillo; de Ibarrola and Loyo; and Tiramonti). Within each chapter overview, I also include a brief critical reflection. I conclude this review with an evaluation of whether the authors' achieved their stated objectives as mentioned in their introduction.

Democratic governance through educational consensual agreement

The first section of the book is titled, "Educational agreement and democratic governance in Latin America." Filmus' goal is to analyze the relation between education and democratic governance (15). The chapter remains at the level of theory until the final page where he offers eight educational policy and program suggestions for developing and maintaining democratic governance in Latin American countries.

Filmus begins by forwarding several definitions of governance, specifically ungovernability, conservative governance, and an alternative to conservative governance: democratic governance. He defines democratic governance, which he suggests should be the goal of Latin American states, as much more than a government's ability to be obeyed because of its own attributes, such as transparency, efficiency, and accountability (Rojas Bolaños 1995; in Tiramonti & Filmus, 2001, 17). Rather democratic governance also requires political actors to know and agree to the rules of the 'political game' "without constant threat of

rupture [to the political process] that plants uncertainty in [a] society (17)." Recognizing this second facet of democratic governance is essential to understanding what is meant by consensus. Simply stated, the agreement between the state and civil society is that together they construct socio-political order (18).

Once Filmus has established his definition of democratic governance, he turns to defining the contribution that education can (and does) make toward developing such an agreement. The second section of his chapter begins with a theoretical discussion of education as an institution that functions both to reproduce *and* produce society. Education, he asserts, does not perform only a reproductive function. It also can (and does) offer opportunities for individuals to produce their own relations with the state as citizen-workers. In other words, education creates conditions through which future citizens: a) are able to strive for a more "integral citizenship" (23) through a more active role in politics and society, and b) can be integrated into the economy.

Filmus is interested in the creation of an educational agreement between the state, teachers, parents, and students that is focused on producing democratic governance within educational institutions. Current crisis conditions demand that such consensual agreements be forged. He offers no 'right' model for the development of such a consensus. However, he suggests that successful examples exist in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, and Nicaragua. He asserts the importance of educational research and evaluation toward the creation of such agreements, through which researchers can systematically and comparatively examine the different cases of successful consensus. They can then assist in developing and strengthening processes that lead to the construction of democratic governance within Latin American educational systems and societies.

Although this chapter was challenging to read and decipher (particularly because so few concrete examples are connected to the theories and concepts he so carefully develops), Filmus carefully lays out the need and importance of including teachers' unions in the educational reform process if building strong democratic Latin American societies is a central goal. This is the strength of the chapter (and the book), and Filmus has set an important precedent for future research.

Understanding the relationship between reform and teachers' unions

The second chapter, "Teachers' unions in Latin America: An analysis of the literature," (Note 3) is a literature review designed to contribute to an understanding of teachers' unions in the region (35). The author suggests that bringing together research on the region's teachers' unions is fundamental to constructing consensus. Using seventy-five research projects conducted in the 1980s-1990s, Murillo focuses on systematically analyzing union actions and positions in relation to educational reform efforts.

The article is divided into several parts, beginning with an introduction. Next, Murillo describes her methodology and the research she analyzes, discussing in detail how she organized the research into a typology. Very useful charts of the typology accompany her analysis. She then articulates the contributions and limitations of the current literature, and concludes by suggesting future lines of inquiry "to advance the systematic knowledge of this theme (38)."

The major findings of this chapter are presented on two levels: 1) the limitations of the literature; and 2) the role of political identity of unions in reform processes. On the first level, Murillo summarizes seven limitations she found within the body of literature analyzed. First, she suggests that her findings mirror gaps identified in a similar study conducted in 1990 (Nuñez 1990), which have not been filled. Second, she finds that few of the nations represented in the research are thoroughly researched, as is the Mexican case. Studies of other nations are still needed to provide a more holistic understanding of state-education relations and alliances found throughout Latin America. Third, she finds that there are few comparative studies of the union-state relationship in reform contexts. She suggests further collaboration among researchers from different disciplines, different nations, and different regions within the same nation to fill this gap. Fourth, she finds that the research tends to focus on conflict, not on the everyday life of teachers "that affects reform implementation" (Murillo, 2001, 58). Another limitation related to this latter point is that the research does not focus on "teacher apathy" (Murillo, 2001, 58), Instead, she finds that researchers tend to focus on teachers who are actively involved in unions, which she suggests may essentialize teachers' positions in relation to reforms. Murillo's sixth limitation is a self-critique. She suggests that her literature search, though thorough, was limited to sources often within one organization in each nation. What research was not included in her sample? How might this have changed her findings? Though she offers no suggestions, she opens the possibility that more research *is* being done on the topic and that there is a need for improved networking of researchers throughout the region. Based on a questionnaire asking directors of Latin American research institutions to critique her findings, she discovered that they agreed with her results. In particular, they voiced concern for the lack of systematic research on the topic and the scarcity of analyses at levels other than national and organizational.

At the second level of the analysis Murillo finds that the historically constructed relationship between the state and teachers' unions is affected by dominant political identity at the moment that reform processes are initiated. The research she analyzed suggests that political identity is an important factor determining the definition of policy reforms (Murillo, 2001, 61-62). In other words, each institution's political identity shapes the production of educational reforms. This finding was echoed in research throughout the region. Unfortunately, the literature does not analyze the reform process beyond this first stage of policy making.

Although the research she reviewed does provide an understanding into how consensus has been established (or not) at this first level of policy making, very little is known of the "conditions that influence the moment of reform implementation" (Murillo, 2001, 62). She concludes, again, that more comparative and systematic analysis of the conditions of teachers' work during reform

processes is needed to "facilitate a definition of educational policy that considers employment and teaching conditions and…creates incentives for the effective implementation" of such reform efforts (Murillo, 2001, 64).

I found that Murillo's detailed description of her methodology is as valuable as the analysis of the articles. By outlining the process through which she acquired the research and an overview of the body of research obtained, she provides a clear path for interested educational researchers to follow and expand upon. In addition, her suggestions for future lines of inquiry reflect the need for continued research of Latin American teachers' unions and provide potential research agendas. Her suggestions serve as the conclusion of her work, but they also mark an important beginning point for improving the quality and depth of research on the theme.

Inside the Latin American teachers' union

The third chapter by de Ibarrola and Loyo, "The structure of Latin American teachers' unions," (Note 4) examines the organizational characteristics of the most important teachers' unions' in nine nations: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Venezuela. Their study fills one of Murillo's 'gaps' by systematically examining the region's union structures. According to De Ibarrola and Loyo, their descriptive endeavor is important to universities, ministries, and international organizations interested in deciphering the logic behind union responses to reforms.

The article is divided into three sections: an introduction that defines and argues for a focus on unions as organizations; a lengthy description of the ten structural elements identified in the nine different teachers' unions; defined using concrete examples from data collected from the unions; and a conclusion that identifies a general profile of teachers' unions based on the preceding analysis and provides relevant themes for future research. Themes for future research from an organizational perspective are offered and suggest that such research will require further typologies of unions. Additionally, they suggest that this research must look at unions' organizational resources in order to understand the conditions shaping the union-reform relationship.

A major finding of the study is that when the principle teachers' unions in Latin America are analyzed systematically from an organizational perspective, there is homogeneity despite the assumption of heterogeneity in light of national context. The authors suggest that further research of unions as organizations would generate valuable insights for states (and educational researchers and policy makers) interested in improving educational reform processes. The authors note that public education suffers when states do not consider unions in educational reform processes. Such research as they are calling for, then, would help states to understand and value the importance of strong unions in establishing "agreements" with teachers (108). Vice versa, the authors' suggest that unions must be more cognizant of the effect of their political actions on public schools.

The authors were very clear from the beginning of the chapter regarding their goal —to analyze data from unions in nine different Latin American nations in an effort to identify common organizational elements. De Ibarrola and Loyo effectively outline the organizational structures of Latin American teachers unions and in doing so, these researchers endeavor to fill one of Murrillo's identified knowledge gaps in teacher union research. Their analysis shows that teachers' unions are complex organizations dedicated to the improvement of public education and in addition their extensive descriptive analysis helps to make clear suggestions for future educational research.

It was unclear to me if the authors' had a particular thesis or goal for their analysis. One possible thesis I identified that could have been made clearer is that union responses to reforms are related to unions' organizational structures and resources (73 and 107). The article appears to be a first important and necessary step toward supporting this thesis in that the organizational qualities identified and meticulously described could be used to identify elements of the organizational structures and resources that affect unions' responses to educational reforms. However, the analysis provided here does not sufficiently connect those elements with the reform processes themselves. The logic of unions' actions toward reforms is not discussed in great enough detail. Nor do the authors extensively discuss in what ways organizational structure creates conditions (or does not create) for consensus. If this indeed was the thesis, their article ended too soon.

Teachers' unions and educational reform in the 1990s

The fourth and final chapter, "Teachers' unions and Latin American educational reform in the 1990s," (Note 5) explores the relations between teachers' unions and distinct Latin American States in the context of national educational reform. The ten nations examined are: Chile, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. This is accomplished by "reconstructing the actors' field of interaction" determining the conditions that shape the strategies employed by teachers' unions within that field.

The chapter begins with an historical overview of teacher union formation. A helpful chart is provided documenting the different unions founded since the late 1800s in each nation. This section informs the reader of the historical development of various teachers' unions, but also parallels the emergence of teachers' unions with a teacher identity. A constructed national teacher identity, in effect, becomes the standpoint from which unions organize and are politically active. In order to understand current teacher union responses to State reforms, educational researchers and policy makers must take into consideration and understand the connection between union activism and national teacher identity. The author also details the historical development of unions' political identity. At times this political identity is explicit because of the union's formal ties to political parties, while at other times, political links are not so clearly demarcated. Within this historical context, the evolution of school attendance and teachers' salaries is detailed in the text and accompanying charts.

The chapter's second section discusses educational reform within the broader context of "restructuring of social order" undertaken by Latin American nations throughout the 1990s. Within the context of broader restructuring, the author highlights five elements of change that affect and shape teachers' union responses to State reforms. Most important to the article's focus is how the identity of teachers and teacher education has changed. No longer is teaching a middle class profession drawing from the regions' middle classes, but is increasingly drawing practitioners from lower social classes that have received their education from less prestigious public schools. According to the author, this change has created contradictions for teachers' unions who must navigate a new field of interaction for a diverse group of teachers (135).

The third section of the chapter focuses on the principle problem affecting the union-state relationship, namely the lack of space for teachers' unions in the proposed organizational model for education (136). Four different disagreements are identified and discussed, each emerging from the lack of union involvement in the reform and restructuring process. A brief fourth section discusses strategies unions have employed as a response to educational reforms, and the final section is a list of eight possible organizational alternatives for unions. She suggests that each alternative for the unions holds the possibility of improving cooperation with the state.

Tiramonti's argument remained unclear to me throughout my reading of this chapter. What is clear is that she is providing an historical justification for current teacher union interactions with the State by walking the reader through the emergence of teachers' unions, national teacher identity, current reforms, and union responses and disagreements with them. Based on her conclusions, I suspect that her argument is that teachers' unions' approach to political engagement with the State must change.

Conclusion

The book fulfills the first of the objectives outlined for the reader in the introduction. As this review demonstrates, three of the four investigations contribute to a deeper understanding of the region's teachers' unions. Murillo provides an overview of current literature on this unique institution. De Ibarrola and Loyo introduce the reader to unions' organizational structures. Finally, Tiramonti provides an historical perspective on the development of union activism and unions' interactions with the Latin American state. It is less clear whether the compilation provides "a reflection on the relationship between consensual agreement and [Latin American] countries' political and educational needs (13)." I suggest that a second objective, which the book does accomplish, is to provide a reflection on alternative means for teachers' unions to improve consensus between the state and teachers' unions.

Policymakers and researchers often overlook unions, even though they play a role (for good or bad) in Latin American educational processes. This volume makes an important contribution to educational literature and policymaking processes

because of the vast amount of empirical data provided on the region's teachers' unions. However, I question the absence of critiques of the same policy making process and the logic of State reforms that the researchers situate at the center of the breakdown of 'agreement' between states and teachers' unions. The creation of new and innovative consensual agreements between teachers' unions and States is vital to the improvement of schooling and Latin American nation's economic and political development. Analyses of the changing nature of the state-education relationship would, I think, additionally require knowledge of the logic of the State's actions, reform efforts, and the changing State institutional structure, in conjunction with greater knowledge of the unions. Without this additional knowledge, responsibility for redeveloping consensus lies with teachers' unions. As Filmus suggests at the beginning of the book, democratic governance should be the goal of Latin American nations. This will, according to his discussion, require states *and* teachers' unions to consider alternative political strategies.

As a last note, qualitative research of teachers' unions (members and employees) *and* teachers' unions' understanding of the reforms would provide invaluable insight into educational reform processes. This volume, if used in conjunction with examinations of teachers' practices in reform contexts, would provide powerful theoretically based insights useful for "reconstructing cooperation" from the perspective of the actors responsible for transforming Latin American educational systems on a day-to-day basis.

Notes

1. Consensual agreement=concertación.

2. All translations are the author's.

3. Sindicalismo docente en américa latina: Aproximaciones al estado del arte.

4. Estructura del sindicalismo docente en América Latina.

5. Sindicalismo docente y reforma educativa en América Latina de los '90.

About the editors

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