

Book Reviews

***Teaching to Transgress: Education as The Practice of Freedom.* By Bell Hooks. Routledge, 1994. ISBN: 9780415908085.**

The purpose of education remains as a discourse rendered to be the center of the field's scholarship. Bell Hooks (pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins) theorized hers as the "engaged pedagogy" as outlined throughout this book. She was inspired by Paulo Freire's work on liberatory pedagogy and her own experience as a minority student and later a professor in predominantly white institutions in the United States. In arguing for the need to shift teaching and learning from Freire's "banking of education" system, Hooks brings up her experience and knowledge as a Black girl in a segregated and later a desegregated one for evidence. In the introduction, the specificity of her experience includes, but not limited to, how "for Black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom" (p. 3) in the latter setting. Within a racialized capitalist society like the United States, Hooks argues that education that she experienced as "merely strives to reinforce domination" (p. 4). Later, her undergraduate learning at Stanford further cemented her critical take on education as the tool for the oppressor to maintain the status quo.

In Chapter 1, Hooks proposes her translated version of Freire's "conscientization" with "critical awareness and engagement," (p. 14) as she goes on to interpret what education as the practice of freedom means. As a Buddhist practitioner, she also brings up the "engaged Buddhism" philosophy coined by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk. In Chapter 4, Hooks reveals Freire's sexism and phallogentrism in his works as her rationale to posit a merge of liberatory and engaged pedagogies. Despite the limitation to Freire's theory, Hooks chooses to

keep using liberation as her paradigm in theorizing as readers can see from Chapter 5. She argues that while the personal experience matters especially in relation to her being as a Black woman in a white supremacist country like the United States, theorizing the experience is liberatory.

Indeed, feminism is also the highlight of this book considering that Hooks dedicates six chapters out of total 14 to explore feminist scholarship. Beginning on Chapter 5 on the need for women to theorize, Hooks presents Chapter 6 by articulating how feminism, in addition to sexism, also dissects other forms of oppressions like classism and racism. Consequently, the marginalized people who come into the classrooms as learners carrying their interlocking-oppression-based experience should be appreciated as knowledge owners by the teachers. Hooks' demand for educators to acknowledge the learners' experience as theory is almost similar to the way Freire built his pedagogy for adult learners (1978). However, Hooks does not bring the most notable Freire's work in this chapter. Rather, she constantly criticizes essentialism in teaching and learning proposed by Fuss (1989). Hooks challenges the Fuss's dismissive take on the oppositional voices in the classroom that come from experiential truths.

While constantly being critical of authoritative figures in the classroom who do not provide spaces for the marginalized learners, Hooks yearns for solidarity among feminist scholars simultaneously. In Chapter 7, 8, and 9 she lays out how to build one with white women, diverse learners, and fellow Black scholars consecutively. While maintaining her relatively justified skepticism towards white women due to the group's historical and ongoing anti-Black racism, Hooks reminds the readers to zoom out to the patriarchy as their common oppressor rather than uncritically comparing the two groups'

oppressions. Then, in Chapter 8, Hooks centers her diverse women's studies classes to expose the challenges in making learning meaningful for her students who might not have experienced the United States the way she and her other Black students have in the past. By doing so, she convinces readers how feminism is for everybody¹ from all backgrounds. Accordingly, Hooks express her hope on diverse feminist scholarship by diverse feminist scholars in Chapter 9.

In contrast with her experience in disintegrated schooling as she recounts in Chapter 2, Hooks values diversity in the United States, one of the global centers for international higher education, during her twenty years as an educator in one. In the same chapter, she encourages professors to deal with their fears of change in the students' composition and paradigm in learning for engaged pedagogy to take place. Further, she even dares her fellow educators to embrace that precise challenge of changing classrooms, as she asserts in Chapter 3. After all, change is the only constant in life². By providing some examples on how to prepare the predominantly white higher institution to build an engaged learning in more diverse classrooms, Hooks devotes this chapter to details over how professors could meaningfully respond to their diverse students. The former must also be willing to learn from the latter to add richness to the practical approaches that reflect the paradigm shifts in both subjects.

Despite the constant changes, some things, particularly on the strategies enacted by the oppressors to maintain their power, remain consistent. In Chapter 11, by reflecting on the inherited wounds from colonialism experienced by the colonized, Hooks points out the way the oppressors continue to

weaponize standard English to "shame, humiliate, colonize" (p. 168) the oppressed today. Language was one of the most effective colonizers' tools in the past and remains to be one in our current neoliberal and globalized world. In education, discourse on language as the main vehicle for teaching and learning inside and outside the classrooms is not only relevant, but highly strategic for engaged pedagogy, too. Access to standard English is often determined by the learner's class status, regardless of their location. As Hooks unpacks the silence on class differences in classrooms through Chapter 12, readers are reminded as to why Hooks' perspective on feminism also interrogates the oppressions based on gender, location, race, and class. Readers also can't help but juxtapose her analysis on class with Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1978) yet again due to their similarities.

Hooks' arguably strong stand on classism, however, is understandably personal. She entered "acutely aware of class" (p. 177) one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in the United States for her undergraduate program due to her "non materially privileged background, from the working poor." (p. 177). Hooks apprises her fellow educators to be fully aware of class bias inside their classrooms to make room for inclusive and engaged pedagogy. Today, neoliberal-based privatization of the colleges and universities across the nations has severely limited, even denied learners from lower and poor working class their access to higher education (Buckner, 2017). In her conclusive reflection on engaged pedagogy in Chapter 14, Hooks critiques how meaningful and engaged dialogues, as she advocates in Chapter 10, barely transpire in the classrooms. Inevitably, the pernicious absence of other

¹ Six years later, in 2000, Hooks published her book titled "feminism is for everybody" to further analyze her paradigm on the matter.

² This famous aphorism is widely ascribed to Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher.

relevant issues mimics the silence on the class differences inside the classrooms. Without consistent dialogue on indispensable concerns, education cannot be valorized as liberatory because both learners and educators eschew the engaged pedagogy. To bell Hooks, education as the practice of freedom is those moments in the classrooms when we “face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (p. 207).

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