

## Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom

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| <b>Type</b>            | Book                     |
| <b>Author</b>          | bell hooks               |
| <b>Place</b>           | New York                 |
| <b>Publisher</b>       | Routledge                |
| <b>ISBN</b>            | 0415908078               |
| <b>Date</b>            | 1994                     |
| <b>Call Number</b>     | LC196 .H66 1994          |
| <b>Library Catalog</b> | Library of Congress ISBN |
| <b>Short Title</b>     | Teaching to transgress   |
| <b># of Pages</b>      | 216                      |
| <b>Date Added</b>      | 10/26/2014, 9:02:15 PM   |
| <b>Modified</b>        | 10/26/2014, 9:02:15 PM   |

### Tags:

Critical pedagogy, Critical thinking, Feminism and education, Study and teaching, Teaching

### Notes:

#### (1) Quotes:

“To create a culturally diverse academy we must commit ourselves fully. Learning from other movements for social change, from civil rights and feminist liberation efforts, we must accept the protracted nature of our struggle and be willing to remain both patient and vigilant. To commit ourselves to the work of transforming the academy so that it will be a place where cultural diversity informs every aspect of our learning, we must embrace struggle and sacrifice (Chapter 2).”

All narratives play a role within the learning community and every voice has something to contribute, especially those that are often silenced by those within positions of power and privilege. This is how we create a safe place for communication within the classroom and to build a foundation of understanding upon entering into the larger society.

“Again and again, black women find our efforts to speak, to break silence and engage in radical progressive political debates, opposed. There is a link between the silencing we experience, the censoring, the anti-intellectualism in predominately black settings that are supposedly supportive (like all-black woman space), and that silencing that takes place in institutions wherein black women and women of color are told that we cannot be fully heard or listened to because our work is not theoretical enough (Chapter 5).”

Women of color are doubly subjugated by oppression, by the construct of both womanhood and racial identity. This censorship is an oppression of silence, undermining the ability for anyone to build necessary dialogue within the learning community, a place where difference can be acknowledged, and to promote self-actualization and unlock critical consciousness.

“To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences (Chapter 10).”

Dialogue is a powerful asset in education, one that not only can challenge the structures of power and privilege, but can allow the establishment of camaraderie between persons of various backgrounds, to provide support for each other as a coalition of allies. This includes persons of power and privilege that are capable of identifying the role their own position affects upon the whole.

“Along with them [the students] I grow intellectually, developing sharper understandings of how to share knowledge and what to do in my participatory role with students. This is one of the primary differences between education as a practice of freedom and the conservative banking system which encourages professors to believe deep down in the core of their being that they have nothing to learn from their students (Chapter 10).”

Learning from students is a practice of freedom, allowing students to identify themselves as participants within a community as opposed to that of passive consumerism.

“To recognize that we touch one another in language seems particularly difficult in a society

that would have us believe that there is no dignity in the experience of passion, that to feel deeply is to be inferior, for within the dualism of Western metaphysical thought, ideas are always more important than language (Chapter 11).”

Through the expression of self, one is able to share themselves, their individual narrative, as an opportunity of self-actualization. Not only are we, as human beings, capable of thought, but we are capable of representing our life experience through language, to implore others to listen and discover realities that differ from their own. This is the bridge of understanding that is communication.

“All too often, students from nonmaterially privileged backgrounds assume a position of passivity - they behave as victims, as though they can only be acted upon against their will. Ultimately, they end up feeling they can only reject or accept the norms imposed on them. This either/or often sets them up for disappointment and failure (Chapter 12).”

Passivity is the bane to self-actualization and critical consciousness. It prevents the individual from recognizing the inherent value of their unmeasurable merit and to express that merit as a contribution of society. To be passive is to accept a division between the body and the mind, alienating the individual from discovering a sense of purpose due to the false rendering of obsolescence of one or the other.

“Commitment to engaged pedagogy carries with it the willingness to be responsible, not to pretend that professors do not have the power to change the direction of our students' lives (Chapter 14).”

Change takes time and often includes the reflection of unsettling realities. A commitment to engaged pedagogy is a responsibility for the educator to push towards critical consciousness within the students. Not only does this allow the student to discover facets of the unknown, through unlocking consciousness, but also to invoke the questioning of purpose. Sometimes that purpose requires the actualization of a change in direction and that is unlocking of critical consciousness and an engaged pedagogy.

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## **(2) Key Concepts:**

Critical Awareness - To be an active participant within the community as a practice of freedom, challenging the domain of power, privilege and oppression.

Engaged Pedagogy - An emphasis of well-being or holistic approach to unlocking critical consciousness; one that commits to the empowerment of self-actualization and the deconstructing of compartmentalized thinking.

Racial Justice - The pursuit of democracy and equity.

Learning Community - A place where difference can be acknowledged.

Shifting Paradigms - Moving away from immediate affirmation and to experience challenges through the sharing of collective knowledge.

Theory as Liberatory Practice - Not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary, but fulfills this function through the embodiment of practice and action; to engage as a participant against domains of oppression, such as sexism, racism and class subjugation.

Voice of Authority - Whoever has power and domination within a setting.

Student Responsibility - To recognize that everyone's lived experience and narrative is legitimate.

Oppressor's Language - Result of conquest, subjugation and dismissal of non-dominant culture, such as that of Standard English in contrast to black vernacular or native tribal languages.

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## **(3) Main Argument:**

Education through engaged pedagogy is the practice of freedom, racial justice, and empowerment through risk-taking of both teacher and student, with an emphasis on well-being and enlightenment through self-actualization. Through the union of mind and body, regarding how individuals live and think, individuals are enabled to embrace the challenge of contradiction and embark toward the learning process. Looking at the engendered nature of black experience is one prime example of looking at the world through a critical lens.

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## **(4) Examination:**

bell hooks takes a critical look at the nature of oppression through the lens of her own engendered black experience, revealing the necessity of wielding a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance in contrast to the

traditional lesson of obedience to authority. Excitement, cultural conflict, student responsibility and engagement within the learning community are key venues for unlocking self-actualization, democracy, and a collective dedication of truth. This is a commitment to an engaged pedagogy, to ensure education as a practice of freedom across various thresholds.

bell hooks has many perspectives shared in common previously explored authors. She makes many references to Milner's myth of meritocracy and the use of conflict to build a catalyst for critical thinking. By reflecting on the past concerning patriarchal hegemony, bell hooks makes reference to Costa and Kallick's disposition of drawing from past knowledge and to apply it into new situations - feminism and democracy, in this case. Through the dissection of female whiteness and power, bell hooks builds a connection with Rury's historical outline of education's past. In her passage regarding the collective dedication of truth as a measure for engaged pedagogy, as well as through her conversation with Ron Scapp in regards to making history, bell hooks also makes reference to many of Greene's ideologies. Most pronounced, of course, is bell hook's frequent and direct reference to Freire's notion of critical consciousness, whose definitions are further supplemented by Cammarota.

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### **(5) Self-reflection:**

Throughout this reading, bell hooks made reference to the traditional outlook of theoretical thinking as being the only legitimate product for academic study. She compares this notion to pursuing subjects within the context of abstract delegation and she further makes it a point that she prefers to write for a more general audience. I found this point to be a distinct curiosity, especially provided her writings concerning abstractions like that of theory and essentialism. Under normal conditions, I frequently write my own passages with abstract terminologies and can typically build a solid definition of them whenever I run into them, however, I found this to not be the case with these two very specific terms used throughout the book. Regardless, I mention this aspect as a recognition of my own challenges of redirecting my thoughts from the abstract into concrete examples for a more inclusive audience to follow. I believe this is an important quality for any future educator to possess, especially those who choose to work with very young children.

bell hooks also included a quote by Patricia Williams that resonated well with me. It reads as follows:

“There are moments in my life when I feel as though a part of me is missing. There are days when I feel so invisible that I can't remember what day of the week it is, when I feel so manipulated that I can't remember my own name, when I feel so lost and angry that I can't speak a civil word to the people who love me best. These are the times when I catch sight of my reflection in store windows and am surprised to see a whole person looking back ... I have to close my eyes at such times and remember myself, draw an internal pattern that is smooth and whole.”

This quote connects with me on so many levels because it reminds me of my experience with working retail for many years, being bullied almost daily throughout K-12, and most recently, my loss and ostracism of "family" since revealing the nature of my own philosophical belief, or more precisely, the lack thereof. These are examples that have impacted my inner-self dramatically and there are often times where I feel like my merit and contribution to the world are either insignificant or outright invisible. I think this draws a similar parallel, although with the inclusion of very specific privileges, with hook's notion of engendered black experience, exposing the nature of being doubly oppressed. This is a reference, among many, that can be drawn upon for building future conversations and bridging an understanding identity.