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## Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom

**Type** Book  
**Author** Bell Hooks  
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**Abstract** In this book, the author shares her philosophy of the classroom, offering ideas about teaching that fundamentally rethink democratic participation. She writes about a new kind of education, education as the practice of freedom. She advocates the process of teaching students to think critically and raises many concerns central to the field of critical pedagogy, linking them to feminist thought. In the process, these essays face squarely the problems of teachers who do not want to teach, of students who do not want to learn, of racism and sexism in the classroom. Teaching students to "transgress" against racial, sexual, and class boundaries in order to achieve the gift of freedom is, for the author, the teacher's most important goal. -- From back cover  
**Short Title** Teaching to Transgress  
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### Tags:

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### Notes:

## 1. 5 Significant Quotes:

**i. p. 12**—“Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.”

—This quote concludes the introductory chapter of the text. It provides a succinct summary of hooks’ pedagogical position.

**ii. p. 34**—“All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom.”

—Here hooks provides a rationale for her pedagogy, centering it on joy, passion, and love directed toward social change.

**iii. p. 113**—“Confronting one another across differences means that we must change ideas about how we learn; rather than fearing conflict we have to find ways to use it as a catalyst for new thinking, for growth.”

—This quote reminds me of the dialectical process, creating spaces for contradictions to emerge enables learning.

**iv. p. 148**—“Once again, we are referring to a discussion of whether or not we subvert the classroom’s politics of domination simply by using different material, or by having a different, more radical standpoint. Again and again, you and I are saying that different, more radical subject matter does not create a liberatory pedagogy, that a simple practice like including personal experience may be more constructively challenging than simply changing the curriculum.”

—Here hooks makes explicit the notion that it is in the practice or form of the teaching process that liberatory education takes place. It is not enough to engage in alternative curriculum if the methods of teaching are not also changed to reflect the cause of liberation.

**v. p. 202**—“...without the capacity to think critically about our selves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow. In our society, which is so fundamentally anti-intellectual, critical thinking is not encouraged. Engaged pedagogy has been essential to my development as an intellectual, as a teacher/professor because the heart of this approach to learning is critical thinking. Conditions of radical openness exist in any learning situation where students and teachers celebrate their abilities to think critically, to engage in pedagogical praxis.”

—This passage from the concluding chapter provides a defense of the importance and centrality of critical thinking to hooks’ notion of pedagogical praxis.

## 2. List of key concepts:

engaged pedagogy; transgression; education as the practice of freedom; critical interrogation; voice; transformative pedagogy; community; privilege; race, class, sex, gender; critical awareness; praxis; biases; critical thinking; mind/body dualism; dialectical exchange; feminism; decentering; liberation

## 3. Statement describing the author's main argument:

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks “shares insights, strategies, and critical reflections on pedagogical practice” (p. 10). Focusing on the necessity to overcome a “mind/body split,” hooks centers the responsibility for critical pedagogy in the act of teaching. The critically aware teacher is aware of their presence as a body in the classroom, not a disembodied mind assigned the role of depositing knowledge in the minds of students. By bringing our awareness to the presence of the body, hooks makes central the role that race, sex and class are also related to teaching. Writing that it is the “the person who is most powerful [who] has the privilege of denying their body,” hooks reminds the critically aware teacher, particularly those who inhabit positions of privilege, that they must be aware of their own presence as bodies in the classroom. There is also a focus on the cultivation of community, and the sharing of experiential knowledge in the practice of an “engaged pedagogy.” These modes of teaching allow transgression of the boundaries that usually separate and reinforce dominant ways of knowing. In sum, hooks challenges us to embrace education “as the practice of freedom.” Moving beyond theory to praxis: the conscious decision to engage a critical pedagogy in the practice of teaching, not just in the material taught.

## 4. Examination of the author's stance on roles and responsibilities of teaching:

a. For bell hooks, the teacher is responsible for practicing what they preach.

It is not enough to simply include material that addresses topics that challenge the dominant ways of thinking in order to be a liberatory educator. The teacher must always be aware of their presence and their practice; their interactions with their students, the way they impost themselves; the way that their teaching reflects their ideas. For hooks, an engaged pedagogy is the practical application of critical pedagogy.

b. Milner would agree that it is important to include the voices of those who are not traditionally listened to in classrooms. Milner directly quotes bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* when addressing recommendations for practice in the section on classroom discussion. Milner agrees that including the voices of the unheard in the classroom creates learning opportunities for both the students and the teacher.

Maxine Greene may wonder whether bell hooks is insisting that the teacher impose their will onto students when hooks asks the teacher to address specific inequities in the practice of teaching. From the perspective of the inwardly focused phenomenological existentialist, the critical pedagogy of bell hooks insists on a particular application of normative ethics. For

hooks, it is imperative that the teacher should operate a particular way in their classroom. hooks insists that the voices of everyone be heard. She insists that the teacher should examine in her practice the specific features that reinforce domination. She insists that a feminist, anti-racist, and class conscious approach to teaching is necessary if the teacher aims for the self-actualization of their students. Though I think that there are many areas where the two author's would agree, I think hooks takes a much more active stance than Greene when it comes to taking positions regarding the actions the responsible teacher should take.

## **5. What did you learn from the author about yourself?**

“The rare white teacher who dared to resist, who would not allow racist biases to determine how we were taught, sustained the belief that learning at its most powerful could indeed liberate.” I hope I can be this kind of white teacher.

Though I have already been thinking about my presence as a white male in our classes and how my position as a white male gives my voice unearned authority; and though I have already been thinking about how during our classroom discussions it is generally the white men who speak the most, I'm not sure what I'm responsible for doing.

I feel excited by ideas and I want to share my thoughts. Yet, I want to listen to other people's ideas, too. And I want to challenge them, to push them to move beyond their initial thoughts and to go deeper. And I want people to do this to me, too. But I've found that most people aren't willing to push back—to challenge and ask questions—if they're accustomed to this kind of talking. hooks says that there is a need for dialectical exchange and that everyone's voice be heard, but how do we help people who aren't comfortable with uncomfortable discussion assert their voice?

## **Attachments**

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