

Book Review

Osman, R. & Hornsby, D.J. (Eds.). 2017. *Transforming Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Towards a socially just pedagogy in a global context*. London: Palgrave.

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A book that aims to transform teaching and learning towards a socially just pedagogy in South Africa sets itself a formidable task. It promises hope in a world easily bathed in despair where contemporary global politics highlights deepening inequalities, accompanied by growing conservatism of the radical right, and seemingly insurmountable global challenges such as forced migration and threats to ecological sustainability. Resistance through protest and advocacy for social responsibility and collective transformation are therefore not surprising and dominate contemporary global media. Universities are not immune to these conflicts. They have become corporatised, neoliberal institutions, emphasising competition, individualism and marketisation, with increasingly sophisticated performance measurement metrics that continue to valorise research above teaching and learning and community engagement. South African higher education has experienced significant student protests over the last four years, most notably the #Rhodesmustfall and #Feesmustfall movements. These protests are ongoing reminders that South African higher education continues to be marked by inequality, racism, patriarchy and multiple intersecting forms of exclusion.

It is in this context that a book such as Osman and Hornsby's inserts itself 'to demonstrate that transformation can be integrated into teaching and learning environments in different imaginative ways and that such integration raises complexities, conflicts and possibilities for students and teachers alike' (Osman & Hornsby, 2017: 1). At the heart of this endeavour, the editors, in chapter 1, pose the question as to 'what constitutes transformative pedagogies, and what is their transformative potential for institutions of higher learning' (Osman & Hornsby, 2017: 1). In essence, the question that is posed asks us to consider what a scholarship of teaching and learning for social justice may be and how that shapes the way in which we think about the role of universities.

The book consists of an introduction and 11 chapters produced by academics working at two South African universities (Wits and the University of Johannesburg) and two international universities from an Indian and Canadian context. Numerous subject areas ranging from Art History to Psychology, Education and Media Studies are involved. The offerings are theoretically diverse, drawing on critical cultural theory as reflected in the work of Stuart Hall, bell hooks and Paulo Freire, while other chapters draw on Fraser's



participatory parity, combinations of critical pedagogy, postcolonial theory, affect theory and critical posthumanism as well as transformative learning theory: all of them are searching for that which may constitute socially just pedagogies.

In chapter 2, Carrim lucidly considers the contribution of Stuart Hall's cultural theory to teaching and learning. He foregrounds the emphasis on relational thinking and the importance of being critical about critical pedagogies. The core focus of socially just pedagogies, from this perspective, is a non-reductionistic approach, one that resists a valorisation of singular identities, and encourages non-polarisation and non-binariad thinking. When teaching modules on racism, he expects students to develop personal-political reflexivity which assumes an awareness of themselves and their location within local histories. The theoretical concepts are illuminated by case studies from contemporary media. The clarity with which this chapter is written is commendable. It creates nuanced and complex insights into what socially just pedagogies may entail.

Mupotsa's chapter is valuable for two reasons. It firstly locates curriculum as extending beyond subject content and hails the nature of structural constraints, such as hunger and lengthy travel times to university, as barriers to optimal learning. Secondly, it highlights the precarity of feminist pedagogies; how they simultaneously may be transformative but could also be limiting. Maringe, in chapter 4 foregrounds contextualised knowledge and dialogical learning, whilst the foregrounding of Africa and the decentring Euro-American knowledges are constituents of socially just pedagogies as is drawing upon postcolonial thinking. Leibowitz, Naidoo and Mayet's chapter, is unlike the other chapters, in that it is based on empirical research with university educators: this explores their understandings of socially just pedagogies. The data allows the authors to generate a relational model, located conceptually in Fraser's notion of participatory parity. Chapter 6 by Kiguwa resonates with Mupotsa's chapter as she provides a nuanced explication of how education can both unlock and silence opportunities for learning. Her chapter is deeply engaging as she illustrates, through actual classroom vignettes, some of the vulnerabilities inherent in teaching responsively, when she shows how embodiment and the social locations of lecturers are interpreted as part of a constellation of assemblages that limit and enable learning.

Cloete and Brenner, in chapter 7, illustrate how it may be useful to have a "sneak preview" into a colleague's curriculum design and the implementation of a module. Their description of their work highlights exactly how learning was scaffolded and how transformation also relates to the everyday ongoing tasks associated with module revision. Wintjes' chapter 8 uses an innovative approach, known as "object biographies", to focus on under researched objects to engage students in a research process as part of their learning experience. Students are given "art" objects such as a photograph or an artefact and they have to research its biography. The description of the project and its theoretical foundations are detailed, and the chapter provides insight into how researching objects' biographies may foster critical reflexivity and an understanding of the historical location of objects. In chapter 9, Iqani and Falkoff raise important questions about the messiness of the everyday business of teaching, which they say is even more so when teaching about race; in this instance

whiteness. The chapter speaks of the way that affective assemblages of students and teachers collide in class. This chapter shows how educators often do not have the answers in the moment, but it also illustrates the value of scholarly reflection for rehearsing future encounters. These rehearsals potentially provide opportunities for transformation, not only among students but also teachers. In chapter 10, Kurup and Sanghai provide a detailed description of higher education in India, with a specific focus on Jawaharlal Nehru University. This chapter shows that democracy cannot always be taken for granted, and how in its absence, the importance of student voice and dialogue constitutes an aspiration for social justice. Chapter 11 by Bagelman and Tremblay draws on transformative learning theory. The authors highlight the synergies between pedagogy and social innovation and the potential for university-community partnerships as transformative engagements for both students and the community organisations where they work. They describe a work-integrated learning project that departs from traditional service learning models. Students are encouraged to think about systems that keep social problems in place and as a collective, find solutions for change.

What then is the value of this book? It provides numerous chapters that describe innovative ways in which university educators teach. More importantly, authors speak to the challenges and opportunities inherent in teaching. We often underestimate to what extent classrooms have become private and isolated spaces for university educators. If we engage in dialogue and scholarly reflection about our teaching, and write about them, our experiences of teaching become public, we set up possibilities for dialogue (and support) and the establishment of educator support networks. Creating such a collaborative resource can be affirming and transformative, disrupting the isolation common in contemporary higher education. The invisible emotional labour central to socially just pedagogies is made visible in this volume. If we consciously create and maintain support networks, we live social justice.

There are nevertheless some tensions that remain. Most educators in this volume, irrespective of theoretical orientation, agree that relationality is crucial and that dialogue and contextual, historical reflexivity are central to the pursuit of socially just pedagogies. The questions that do remain are both practical and theoretical. Very little attention is paid to assessment in this volume and how it can intersect with socially just pedagogies. Another pertinent question relates to the affordances and challenges for social justice that learning technologies enable. In spite of these questions, this book is highly recommended particularly since it provides a useful platform for dialogue and sharing.

Reviewed by

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