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BOOK REVIEW

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Caralyn Zehnder, Cynthia Alby, Karynne Kleine, Julia Metzker. (2021). *Learning that Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education.* **Myers Education Press. 225 pp. $ 111 (Hardcover), ISBN: 978-1975504502**

In today's 21st century, the traditional way of teaching has mostly given way to transformative education in which teachers should not only impart knowledge, but also facilitate the acquisition of skills by students (David, 2016). Educators in transformative education play the role of helping students to understand and acknowledge "the dynamics between their inner and outer worlds" (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p.261). This book provides guidance to teachers in the higher education system to help them design courses that can create meaningful learning experiences for students and actively engage them in social issues.

LEARNING THAT MATTERS

A FIELD GUIDE TO
COURSE DESIGN FOR
TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

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Summary

In this book, "learning" covers multiple layers of meaning, including learning theories, learning outcomes and assessments, course design, teaching strategies and techniques, etc. As educators who will pursue careers at universities or are already teaching in higher education, no matter whether you are novice or senior, this book provides scaffolding for you from three aspects: a). how to design transformative lessons, how to create successful transformative learning experiences for students, and how to shape the identity of the transformative teacher.

This book consists of 10 chapters. And each chapter is completed by a team of four brilliant and professional educators who have specific disciplinary expertise. Collaboration is constantly brought up in the book. Whether it is the way the book is written or the various activities that are recommended throughout the book, readers will find traces of collaboration. This is the element that the authors are proud of.

Full listing of authors and contacts can be found at the end of this article.
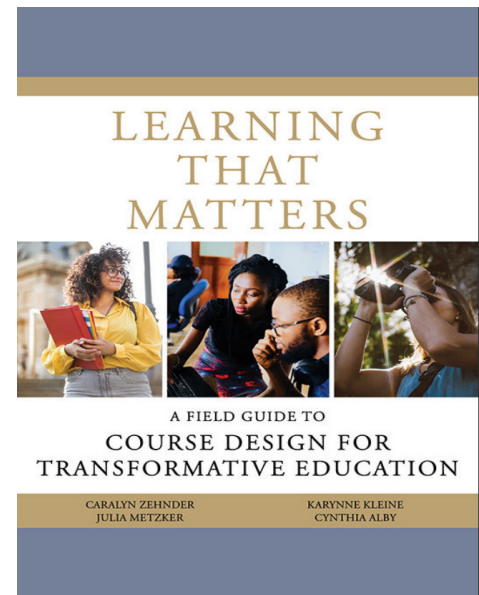
Each chapter of the book covers ample content and inspiration. Chapter one ("Teaching Matters") begins with the challenges that American higher education is facing in the present era, which include unequal distribution of educational resources, teachers who are very productive in research but weak in pedagogical knowledge, unequal power relations between "Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and their White counterparts" (p. 2), and the lack of capacity of higher education institutions to respond quickly to unexpected situations (e.g. Covid-19). All these problems are calling for changes in course design. The authors mention that educators in higher education institutions should regard exposing all of their students to transformative learning experiences as their teaching goal. This chapter also contains the introduction for all four authors and their beliefs about course design and teachers' professional development. At the end of this chapter, the authors provide a guide to using this book so that readers can get insights into how to get the most out of this book.

In chapter two ("From the Foundation Up"), the authors firstly mention that trying to turn the classroom into a base for transformative education requires fostering creativity, and that means a degree of "improvisation" (p.18). This chapter provides four important concepts and principles for supporting this improvisation. The first one is about equity. The authors extract decentering pedagogy from critical theory, starting from no longer viewing students "within a deficit framework" (p. 27) and cherishing all students' funds of knowledge, the authors then propose pedagogical approaches that promote equity. The second concept is aimed at the constructivist approach. In this section, by explaining the crucial role of constructivism in acquiring knowledge, the authors remind readers that students in the classroom are not just passive recipients, and transformative education cannot be teacher-centered. The third concept emphasizes creativity in promoting students' engagement. The authors point out that the course focusing on active learning could be helpful to students' scores. It is vital for teachers to understand how motivation influences learning. The fourth concept, therefore, focuses on the role of motivation. In this part, the question of whether students are motivated by mastery or performance goals is discussed. In the end, the authors hope teachers who have already built their teaching foundations could think about how to connect these concepts and theories with students' deep learning.

In chapter three ("Design Matter"), the authors shift the center from concepts to practical issues, focusing on course design. The aim of this chapter is trying to convince teachers that using design to guide teaching can be a very beneficial thing for both teachers and students. Additionally, the authors provide three complementary and connected designing approaches for teachers, which are design thinking, backward design, and universal design for learning (UDL). In short, design thinking is human/student-centered. It firstly needs teachers to develop empathy and collect students' information before class, then anticipates the kinds of problems they will encounter in their classes, lists the worst possible outcomes for their classes, and find out the solutions in advance. This approach offers a framework for planning courses that are closely tied to the student experience. Backward design is a course design approach guided by learning objectives, which requires teachers to think about what students need most to be successful. For UDL, it is an approach considering serving more students. It aims at establishing a learning environment to support students' diversity. In the end, the authors mention that the strategies provided in this chapter are important and will be repeatedly mentioned in the following chapters.

Chapter four ("Portable Outcomes") is about portable outcomes, which means that students can take what they learn in one class to subsequent classes, and even to later work and life, rather than outcomes that are forgotten once the test is completed. In this chapter, the authors begin by differentiating the definition of student learning outcomes (SLOs) and aspirational goals. Compared with aspirational goals which could be long-term and ideal, SLOs are more specific and measurable, which refer to as knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Before introducing how to design SLOs, the authors demonstrate the "alignment" between SLOs and "the coherence students experience" in the classroom. (p.83). Then, the authors give suggestions for how to write substantive SLOs. They should be student-centered, measurable, interlude, and inclusive. Specifically, students are able to know what they should anticipate from the course, and realize how they will perform in class to meet the outcomes. In addition, the authors mention that substantive SLOs should take affection into consideration, which means that teachers should present clearly what they want their students to care about after finishing the course. What is more, well-designed SLOs should also care about students' diversity so as to avoid biases. In the end, the authors advocate that after encompassing the above four characteristics, a truly portable goal must be to help students achieve higher order thinking skills that include analyzing and evaluating.

Chapter five provides an approach, which is also a framework, called the Dilemma, Issue, or Question Approach (DIQ). The authors summarize it as an approach to connecting subject knowledge with social issues. Teachers utilize this approach to guide students using the knowledge they have learnt in class to solve real social problems. The authors point out that by doing this, students can more easily understand the usefulness of the knowledge and the reason why they need to learn it. In this chapter, multiple resources including reference websites and books are given to help readers think about how to design their DIQ framework. The authors also focus on describing the four steps of designing DIQ from brainstorming to getting feedback. It is important to summarize from the authors that DIQ breaks the status quo that critical thinking skill is only limited to "elitist activity" (p. 114).

In Chapter six ("Connected Assessment"), the authors spend a great deal of time explaining assessment-related knowledge. The significance of this chapter is evident in the way that it helps address teachers' ongoing focus on what a few students cannot do, in suggesting that teachers need to think about how to support the progress of all students, and in the need to recognize the strengths that each individual brings to the classroom. The authors start by expressing their concerns about unequal issues brought about by today's assessments. In the next part, instead of explaining "assessment jargon", the authors present assessment along "two continuums", which are from connected to unconnected assessment, and from summative to formative assessment. In terms of comparing unconnected and connected assessment, the authors interpret connected assessment as the one which underlines the growth and achievements of students. It is aligned with SLOs with a stepped increase in difficulty as a way to see students' progress. The authors also compare formative and summative assessment and suggest that formative assessment is not done by scoring at the end, but by collecting and using the information obtained during the learning process to change and improve students' learning process. It is a relatively fair way of assessing. The rest of the chapter is reserved for how to provide effective feedback to students, which also contains the forms, focuses, rubrics that teachers need to pay attention to when they give feedback.

Chapter seven ("The Power of Projects") involves some of the practical skills that teachers use to design classroom activities that can effectively engage students and are simultaneously convenient for teachers to give formative feedback. The authors start this chapter by explaining the reason for the popularity of project-based learning. Then, three characteristics that should be equipped by a good project are explained in detail by the authors, which are authentic, collaborative, and transparent. The authors give many examples of actual classroom activities to make these three characteristics more visual and tangible.

Chapter eight ("Strategies that Matters") mentions teaching strategies which could lead to significant learning. The authors introduce a concept of high-quality strategies which should be "active and engaging, intrinsically motivating, sticky, and culturally affirming" (p.207). A good high-quality strategy does not have to meet all of these characteristics, but it does need to equip many of them. Next, the authors mention the need for teachers to develop different strategies at different stages of learning. The authors also give different and respective suggestions and activities that teachers can do to prepare students for learning, engage students in learning, discuss in the classroom, and make learning visible so that teachers can choose and implement them according to their own conditions and classroom conditions. This chapter concludes with a guide for readers to reflect on their own strategies and a summary of high-quality strategies so that readers will have a deeper understanding of what strategies can cause deep and significant learning.

In chapter nine ("Supporting Students"), how to provide targeted support to students to ensure their success, effectively address inequities in education, and ensure enduring learning is a core topic. The authors provide ideas from four perspectives. Firstly, teachers should guide students to find value in learning, which means that if students can understand the purpose of the course and tap into the value of the course, they can be more engaged. Secondly, the authors mention that by praising students for their efforts and scoring less, teachers should provide the support that allows students to be unafraid of challenges and setbacks, and allows students to develop a "growth mindset" (p.263). Thirdly, Teachers have the responsibility to make students find a sense of belonging in the classroom. Lastly, the authors mention the negative stereotype that students develop when they experience setbacks, which is also called "stereotype threat" in the chapter. It is important to help students reflect on their self-values to counter this stereotype.

As a summary and ending chapter, chapter ten ("Your Turn: Self- and Collective Efficacy") plays a crucial role in helping reshape a transformative teacher's identity. As was mentioned in Chapter two that innovation is vital for developing transformative education. The authors in this chapter introduce Bandura's "collective-efficacy" to underline the significance of collaboration for innovation (p.281). At the same time, it is also important to build a community of mutual trust and respect for students, in which students can obtain the necessary skills. The authors also recommend that teachers join or establish teacher learning communities, or "communities of change agents". There they can monitor and help each other to become qualified transformative educators (p.287).

Evaluation

The authors have succeeded in achieving the goal of improving and expanding teachers' skill sets described at the beginning of the book. Especially when reading chapters 3-9, which encompass all the things educators should consider when designing a course.

The whole book is highly readable and interactive. As I took notes while reading, I found that I could easily extract the key information from each chapter and understand it without much difficulty. Another strength of the book is reflected in its writing structure. Each chapter begins with a *Preflection* in a box, which may be a thought-provoking question or a small survey, giving the reader a preliminary idea of the chapter's content before they even start reading the text. Next, the authors list the activities they set up in this chapter and what they hope the reader will ultimately gain from the chapter's contents. By doing this, the authors make the outcomes of the chapter transparent to readers, which allows the scrutiny from readers when they finish this chapter. In writing each chapter, instead of explaining theories and concepts, the authors present numerous activities, their own experiences, and evidence-based strategies. After presenting a piece of content, the authors set up a "reflect to learn" session, asking one or two questions to give readers a short buffer and reflection time before moving on to the next module to better consolidate what they have just read. Each chapter follows the same pattern, starting with *Preflection* and ending with ensuring that the readers can make the design happen. With this step-by-step guidance, readers will become more and more confident and motivated.

Conclusion

Overall, facilitating students to find motivation and meaning in the university's classroom, acquiring the competence needed for the 21st century, realizing and addressing social inequities are goals that teachers should be committed to designing their courses, and that is also what this book is trying to help teachers achieve. As a guide book, *Learning That Matters: A Field Guide to Course Design for Transformative Education* is suitable for both individual educators and a group, like a faculty study group, since collaboration is ceaselessly mentioned throughout the book. Teachers can also practice the activities and evidence-based strategies in the book in a selective manner.

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