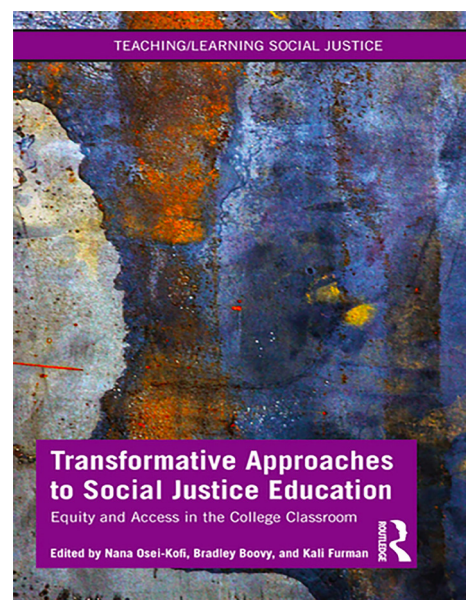


BOOK REVIEW

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Osei-Kofi, N., Boovy, B., & Furman, K. (Eds.). (2022). *Transformative approaches to social justice education: Equity and access in the college classroom*. Routledge. 304 pp. \$ 31.96 (Paperback), ISBN: 978-0367551032

While social justice has become an increasing priority in many public institutions in the country, the Difference, Power, and Discrimination program at Oregon State University has been enlightening undergraduates for 30 years. Born out of student advocacy and the faculty that supports them, the program is an established collection of diversity education courses and faculty training seminars. The program has survived budget cuts, critics, and other challenges throughout its 30 years. *Transformative Approaches to Social Justice Education* describes the methods of the program pragmatically and unflinchingly so readers of the book can apply them to their classrooms.



Introduction

The book is comprised of four sections, all of which feature strategies and methods from DPD faculty that teach undergraduate students about different aspects of identity. Accessibility needs, race, gender, sexuality, and economic class differences are all addressed in the book. Additionally, a wide array of techniques is utilized throughout the book. Everything from collaborating with archivists and farmworker unions to incorporating social justice into STEM coursework is discussed. DPD is a requirement for undergraduates within their general education classes, but it does not add to the number of credits the students need to take (Osei-Kofi, et al., 2021, p. x-xi). It has the two-fold benefits of both broadening white students' perspectives and helping students from historically marginalized groups feel more included. Faculty have also benefited from this program, which features specific training programs to

help faculty embody the spirit of DPD within their classes and pedagogy.

The following review will cover the book's four sections in order, touching on its fifteen chapters and their respective authors. The first section, "Archives and Power: Engaging History Collaboratively," covers the history of the DPD program and how to incorporate diverse narratives through history. The second section, "Frameworks for Transformative Pedagogies" discusses the challenges of making courses more accessible both in the classroom and online. "Destabilizing Dominant Narratives," the third section, addresses the triumphs and challenges of teaching difficult subjects such as race, economic class, and transgender rights. The final section, "Rethinking Approaches to Disciplinary Content" provides the reader with meaningful ways to incorporate social justice topics in both STEM and humanities-based courses.

Full listing of authors and contacts can be found at the end of this article.



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Section 1: Archives and Power: Engaging History Collaboratively

Echoing the sentiments of the introduction, the first chapter by Kali Furman addresses the circumstances in which the DPD program was created. It starts by addressing the racist founding of the state of Oregon. Oregon's state constitution is the only one created with a clause banning Black people from residing there (p. 4). When Oregon State University was founded, it too became an institution based on the interests of white Americans, including being established on the stolen land of Native Americans (p. 5). Over time, the demands of students and the student body's diversity have grown. After incidences of racism on campus over the decades, student activists proposed creating a diversity education program to try to make the university more inclusive (p. 3). The fact that the DPD program has survived multiple budget cuts and other threats to its existence, is a testament to the power of OSU student advocacy and the faculty that supports them. The creation of the program and its continued existence demonstrates the ongoing need for such a program at a primarily white institution. Crucially, Furman notes that white and students of color still have "divergent" experiences at OSU (p. 5). Consequently, the legacy of "student activism and institutional moves to create offices or programs" to undertake "issues around diversity and inequity continue today" (p. 5).

The following two chapters, written by archivist Natalia Fernandez and ethnic scholar Natchee Blu Barnd, feature methods for teaching social justice through history. Fernandez shares the powerful possibilities for archival texts to promote social justice both within OSU and in the larger community. She shares her collaboration with professors to create eye-opening document analysis activities for students. When voices were absent from the OSU archives, Fernandez sought to find representation for them. Fernandez and Boovy co-founded the OSU Queer Archives in 2014 and have expanded it with the help of student interviewers (pp. 22-25). Barnd's chapter details his students' creation of social justice tours of the college town in which OSU is located. He describes how walking tours "remind us to pay attention to our relationships to the land (and its people) wherever we find ourselves," something that he attributes to his upbringing as an indigenous man (p. 43). From the beginning of each course, "the students directly practice techniques for collecting, analyzing, and incorporating community histories and highlighting contested productions of geography, especially in

relation to race and racism" (p. 44). After taking a tour, the shared stories come to him every time he walks by that location. Both Fernandez and Barnd provide practical ways to implement these activities and events. Universities' archival resources provide transformative tools for sharing new perspectives on history with students.

Section 2: Frameworks for Transformative Pedagogies

Chapters Four and Five carry important reminders of equity and accessibility for anyone in the education field. Written by Jenkins and Smith, Chapter Four covers instructional design and their efforts to improve the accessibility of courses for students with disabilities through the principles of Universal Design. Jenkins also shares her experiences with having disabilities while in academia. Their chapter discusses the ubiquity of ableism in academia and how Universal Design principles can help fight ableism (pp. 68-69). The chapter features recommendations for implementation, including a tool for identifying the perceived challenges of an assignment and encouraging consideration for what consequences an academic requirement might have (pp. 76-78). They suggest providing options that best fit the needs of students including flexible attendance and multiple modalities to demonstrate learning (pp. 80-83).

In Chapter Five, Myers expounds on many of the same concerns as Jenkins and Smith but for online academic settings. She argues, "design principles for accessibility should be a baseline" for online course design and suggests going further by including cultural responsiveness (p. 99). Because online courses can exasperate inequities and accessibility issues, Myers explains some of the steps that instructors can take to allow flexibility, alleviate some of the instructor-student power imbalances, and enlighten students to institutional discrimination through course tasks (pp. 90-96). Myers successfully brings awareness to considerable injustices and guides online instructors on how to promote greater equity and accessibility in their courses.

Chapters Six and Seven share many commonalities in the internal, empathetic work that they suggest instructors and students take part in to bring greater awareness to injustices. Though the chapters cover different frameworks, they are both highly internalized and potentially emotionally difficult. Clough warns in Chapter Six that teaching peace literacy requires a deep personal understanding of one's biases and it can be



draining (p.106). Pitcher and Martinez note in Chapter Seven that the sentipensante work, largely done through reflective activities, is not something that everyone is ready for, especially in a public setting (p.136). If one is ready to take on this work, then Clough suggests peace literacy to build empathic soft skills and promote consciousness to both personal and structural biases and the systems that perpetuate them (pp. 106-107). Pitcher and Martinez describe sentipensante as more of a belief system to promote one's sense of belonging and restore their sense of being able to live their life wholly (pp. 127-129). Although powerful philosophies, both chapters hint at the challenges of tackling emotional issues correctly in the classroom. There needs to be extensive training and personal reflection on the instructor's part to lead these types of activities (p. 129). These chapters should serve as a primer to these frameworks and further exploration should be done before attempting to use them in the classroom. However, when well done, students can "gain confidence, find strength, and resilience through their narratives combined with history and social issues" (p. 135).

Section 3: Destabilizing Dominant Narratives

Containing some of the most engaging chapters of the book, Section Three aims directly at how to teach difficult topics of social justice and the impact a professor's positionality can have on student interpretations of the content. Though positionality is prominent in *Transformative Approaches*, it is particularly addressed in how this section and Section Four's Ronald Mize approach their respective social justice issues.

Chapters Eight and Nine prioritize bringing greater positionality to their respective fields. In Chapter Eight, Rakes and Driskill write about the specific inclusion of trans studies as part of its Queer Studies program. Within the field of Queer Studies, white voices have been dominant, and OSU's QS courses work to disrupt that focus. Instead, by giving privilege to voices from people of color, various levels of (dis)abilities, and income levels, OSU's program promotes intersectionality (pp. 146, 149). In doing this, white students must consider the spectrum of experiences and identities among the LGBTQ+ community and who is impacted by systems of oppression. They then teach how to grapple with anger at systemic oppression and put it towards "the fruit of collective liberation" instead of using anger to be destructive (P. 144). In Chapter Nine, Maldonado focuses on the ways that she incorporates intersection-

ality into her Latinx studies classes by including race and ethnicity, gender, and labor rights. She also reflects on how her own identity as a Latina impact how she is perceived by students. Many of her students have never had a Latinx educator before and they sometimes respond in different ways. Students of color may be validated by her presence and some, primarily white students seem to think she brings a "Latinx agenda" (pp. 160-161). These reactions from students bring a lot of assumptions to what can already be a difficult topic to teach. Additionally, Maldonado explains how she handles students who do not believe in her course's relevance. She offers strategies to help students make personal connections and classroom exercises to discuss inequalities, workers' rights, and unions (pp. 167-168). Her inclusion of student reactions underlines both the work that educators of color can achieve, but also the biases they may encounter from others.

Growing up working-class herself, Hurst references back to her own identity in Chapter Ten. There seems to be a blind spot for the role economic class plays in a person's identity, privilege, and understanding of the world. Hurst explains that while directly addressing economic class in the classroom is forceful, equally important is maintaining the privacy of those less privileged. Sharing personal experiences can be uncomfortable or even humiliating, especially for those that are less privileged. Instead, she suggests personal reflective exercises on privilege should be done privately or anonymously (pp. 181-182). However uncomfortable, we must keep tackling economic class and privilege. In talking about class, she explains, it helps "us build those necessary alliances between Black, Brown, and white people" to stop the "racists" from winning (p. 175).

Boovy and Osei-Kofi finish the section by describing their individual experiences teaching about race at a predominantly white institution. They argue that OSU's history, culture, and legacy all carry white dominance, which is why teaching about race is so crucial (p. 192). The teaching method that they share is "teacher as text" which started as a way for teachers to demonstrate their authentic selves and help students learn complexity around social issues like race, poverty, and police brutality (p. 193). Both writers share their own experiences of how their identities impacted how students respond to them for better or worse (pp. 196-201). They agree that misunderstandings will happen when teaching about race, which is why race must continue to be addressed (pp. 200-202).



Section 4: Rethinking Approaches to Disciplinary Content

Koehlinger and Freehling-Burton begin the section by delineating the importance of challenging the Christian-based norms of mainstream American culture, for the country is far more religiously diverse than it may appear (p. 207). They share how their faiths impact their teachings and students' interpretations of their teachings (pp. 208-210). The chapter moves on to historical and contemporary anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the U.S. (pp. 216-223). The reader will come away from the chapter reflecting on the perpetration of Christian dominance and on how harmful stereotyping of non-Christians is damaging to religious tolerance in the U.S. (p. 212).

Mize is the first generation of his family to have not spent time in the fields. In Chapter Thirteen, he discusses the intentional design of his course, which focuses on farmworker justice movements throughout American history (p. 237). To tie in the DPD program requirements, there is a particular emphasis placed on "the social construction of difference, the historical and contemporary relevance of racism and other forms of institutional discrimination, and how these social categories shape the lived experiences of farmworkers residing in the United States" (p. 238). He frequently collaborates with a union leader for this course and is quick to explain how service-learning can be done poorly (p. 237). Aims to help farmworkers should not be an act of voyeurism (pp. 240-241). Mize's thoughtful analysis of service-learning and consideration for the farmworkers make it one of the more impactful and meaningful chapters of the book.

In Chapter Fourteen, Borradaile challenges the perception that social justice education has no place in STEM courses. She meaningfully embeds intersections of STEM and human rights together, such as how the American government uses surveillance against political and racial groups (p. 257). Borradaile provides specifics on navigating these issues and what methods to use. One is using "affinity groups" where students work to come to a consensus on incidents of discrimination that have occurred at their university and how they should respond. Students discuss the pros and cons of different actions, recognizing that there often is not a perfect response (253-254). Additionally, she shares the unfamiliarity of teaching and learning about emotionally difficult topics for STEM instructors and students. Borradaile herself had to adjust and she has found that students understand best from first-person

narratives. It adds a voice to sometimes complex and difficult topics (255). Though challenging, Borradaile demonstrates that bridging STEM and social justice is possible.

Chapter Fifteen rounds out the book by alluding back to the power of teaching history in a reflective way. Richards describes her work to "disrupt students' notions of objective research" and demonstrates that historical work is "intimate, value-laden, and rich with struggles and questions of self" (p. 268). Chappell and Richards remind us of the power of primary documents for helping students "see the multiple dimensions of systemic and pervasive mechanisms of oppression in operation on multiple scales (p. 266). By taking classic history teaching methods and layering them with critical analysis, Chappell and Richards add to what many history educators already do.

Evaluation

As an educator, the themes of social justice and anti-racism have been recently reverberating throughout both the K-12 and postsecondary institutions that I am a part of. It would be easy to write this book off as one following the current trends. However, this compilation sets itself apart because of its thoughtfulness, variety, and experience. Few other universities, and institutions for that matter, have a diversity and inclusivity program that is thirty years old. Oregon State University was not just following a trend, but in response to student advocacy and demands three decades ago. What better source to learn about teaching social justice than a pioneer in the field?

This level of experience is reflected in the various methodologies described in *Transformative Approaches*. The best chapters describe thoughtful consideration and planning, drawing from learned experiences and student reactions. They also featured underrepresented topics, such as transgender and disability rights. Notably insightful chapters include Mize's "Sí, se puede! Teaching farmworker justice" and Hurst's "Talking about class" for their insight and consideration of both the topics they teach and the students they work with. Mize co-planned with a local union leader, deciding that "this could not be yet another class where students learn about farmworkers and to repeat the surface representations of them" (p. 239). Mize's community partnership with a local union, as well as archivist Natalia Fernandez's collaborations with faculty, and Barnd's local history tours are all examples of the ways the DPD program extends beyond the OSU campus.



Many chapters were helpful with specific strategies that could be somewhat simply implemented in busy educators' lives. Myers' "Critical Pedagogy Online" and Jenkins and Smith's chapter covering Universal Design both provide thoughtful tools for making courses more accessible and flexible –especially pertinent in the time of a pandemic. For a handbook on social justice education, the chapters that featured pragmatic, simple suggestions were often the most valuable.

The most difficult chapters often featured pedagogies or frameworks that were out of reach for the average reader. They contained warnings about needing extensive training and not being for everyone. While the chapters served as primers on sentipensante and peace literacy, they also described deeply philosophical (perhaps even spiritual) cognitive work. The chapters provided exercises to utilize but were also tinged with the implication that the pedagogies were extremely difficult to conduct correctly. They seem to be more intimidating than easily accessible.

Conclusion

Transformative Approaches incorporates positionality, personal narratives, and experience-tested teaching methods to thoughtfully create a social justice handbook that educators from many fields will find valuable. Its personal sentiments and a wide variety of topics set it apart from other resources with a narrower focus. Of its highlights are highly implementable strategies that have been time-tested and advocacy for underrepresented topics in diversity education. Its few downfalls are simply a few chapters that require much further education or lack realistic recommendations for classroom usage. Educators are busy and want practical takeaways. As Smith and Jenkins describe their approach to increasing course accessibility, it "is a pedagogical practice that requires ongoing commitment and negotiation" (p. 80). Achieving greater equity and promoting social justice in educational institutions must also take this long-haul, step by step approach, hence the importance of manageable frameworks and methods like this book provides.

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