

Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope by bell hooks.
New York: Routledge, 2003. 200 pp. ISBN 0-415-96818-6

Following the success of *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), bell hooks provides readers with yet another incredibly powerful text on the topic of education. In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks offers important lessons for how to create critical educational arenas that dismantle oppression and build community across racial, ethnic, gender, class, and national lines. She challenges the belief that education is confined to classrooms, where students are often viewed as empty vessels and lessons serve to prepare for a test rather than to teach relevant skills for creating better communities. Through autobiographical narratives and critical analysis, hooks provides readers with important insights in each chapter, covering numerous topics from democratic education to romantic relationships between professors and students. Taken as a whole, the text seeks to uncover mechanisms that perpetuate systems of oppression, highlight the efforts of individuals and groups to change these systems, and most importantly, mobilize educators and students to work toward building socially just communities.

In *Teaching Community*, hooks reflects on the ways oppression, particularly an “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” is continuously perpetuated in our nation’s culture. In her third chapter, “Talking Race and Racism,” hooks contends that by refusing to acknowledge and talk about race and racism in their current manifestations, we leave racist attitudes and behaviors unchallenged. As a way of challenging the belief that oppressive attitudes and practices cannot be positively changed, hooks provides readers with several examples that show transformation is possible. In her first chapter, she briefly describes how Black Studies and Women’s Studies emerged to defy the indoctrination of racist and sexist ideologies in university classrooms and curricula across the country. Despite efforts to dismantle these new disciplines, both continue to provide counter-hegemonic spaces and challenge oppressive ideologies in higher education.

Racist oppression is also perpetuated by the belief that White individuals are always inherently racist. In her fifth chapter, “What Happens When White People Change,” hooks argues that racism and other forms of oppression will not end until we believe that racist, classist, and sexist beliefs and values can be positively transformed in all people. To further explore this point, hooks includes a chapter that highlights her colleague and friend Ron Scapp, a White male professor who continuously engages in anti-racist work. His example serves to demonstrate that not all Whites are racist, as common stereotypes suggest, and that courage and radical openness are necessary for change.

As evidenced by the many examples provided in the text, transformation is possible. Hooks believes education holds the most promising key for undermining continuing racist, classist, and sexist beliefs and practices. In *Teaching Community*, she builds on these examples to provide readers with important lessons and tasks to radically open the mind and challenge these systems of oppression. For hooks, creating socially just communities requires that educators reject binaries that create rigid divisions separating what we see as school and home, teacher and student, or even education and “real world” work. Education needs to be redefined as a much more holistic process, in which teachers and students are simultaneously engaged in both learning and imparting knowledge. In her chapter “Heart to Heart,” hooks embraces the idea that teaching requires love, challenging the traditional perspective that teachers must keep their emotional distance from students. Only by being fully committed to students will teaching become a practice that validates the whole person, not just what he or she can produce on a test. The myth that formal schooling is the single setting in which learning and teaching take place is also shattered. Education can happen anywhere and at anytime. A democratic education must go beyond the boundaries of the classroom, into places such as the home, work, or even conversations in the car. hooks argues that as the world continually changes, learning and teaching must always be a part of our ongoing real-world activities.

One of the strongest elements of *Teaching Community* is its accessibility to multiple audiences. An incredibly talented writer, hooks breaks away from the alienating language often found in academic literature to embrace a literary form that utilizes narrative to speak directly to the reader in a personal and profound way. Reading *Teaching Community*, it often feels as if you are face to face with hooks. Such closeness allows the reader to experience her message of hope in the most intimate way. It is this message of hope and optimism, which is also critical of the current educational system, which makes *Teaching Community* not just a piece of important theoretical scholarship but also a suggestive guide for practice. Finally, hooks also brings to her writing a refreshing acknowledgment of the values of love, spirituality, and service that are so fundamental to learning and teaching but which are typically absent from educational literature.

While bell hooks articulates powerful and necessary tasks for contemporary times, *Teaching Community* may leave teachers and practitioners frustrated with its lack of details regarding how to create the loving community she envisions. It may leave readers, especially educators, wanting more insight on the particular suggestions offered throughout the book, such as how to constructively address racism in the classroom. Although powerful, her multiple stories and distinct topics, which range from racism to eroticism to spirituality, can leave readers wondering how they all connect. Despite these possible

limitations, hooks provides her readers with insightful and important teachings for engaging in necessary educational and social transformation.

Although targeted primarily at educators and students, *Teaching Community* is a book for all audiences. The task of unlearning racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in order to create socially just communities is a shared responsibility that requires the participation of all of us.

References

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Reviewer

Veronica Velez is a doctoral student in Social Science and Comparative Education at UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. Although her interests are varied, she is driven by grassroots parent groups working in their local communities to improve schools. This work motivates Veronica's current research that seeks to identify, validate, and incorporate community and parent cultural wealth in schools, particularly in Chicana/o communities. She is also interested in research paradigms that debunk deficit thinking about Parents of Color and practical models that help redefine parental involvement and partnerships within school communities.