

Florence, N. *bell hooks' engaged pedagogy: A transgressive education for critical consciousness* (Westport, CN.: Bergin & Garvey, 1998).

**Transgress: to go beyond the limits of: to pass over (any limit or bound)**

Education is all about definition. For ages, those in and outside of the educational arena have debated the "meaning" of education – its fundamental purpose. Some would argue that education is a means of socialization, a moral and political indoctrination into the cozy yet often contradictory confines of democracy. Others would take a more capitalist approach (as education equals human capital) in their definition of education, while still others would take a rather simplistic yet vital tack: education is for cognitive and manipulative skill development. All definitions – alone and as a whole – would surely describe a slice of what this entity called education actually is.

Within this debate over the definition of education, there is a relatively small yet progressively potent faction that believes that education is a means of personal enlightenment and personal power. Led by Paulo Freire, critical educators offered a counter-argument to the "traditional" definitions of education. To them, education was a means of acquiring a knowledge base that would transcend individuals beyond restriction and limitation and into the realm of both personal consciousness and political action. Thus, education is the act of personal and political movement.

Within the circles of color consciousness, few have articulated this sense of pedagogical empowerment and movement more than bell hooks. For decades, hooks has been at the vanguard of social (read: education) justice. Her numerous writing on the subject of color and class-conscious education have moved the pedagogical discourse from limitation to possibility. And it is this premise of possibility that lies at the heart of Namulundah Florence's masterful expose of the theoretical underpinnings of hooks' socially constructed definition of education. For at its core, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy*, is a chronicle of a woman's determination to promote a social justice that is empowering, yes, but also transgressive in its ability to move personal consciousness from the domain of servitude and stagnation to the domain of independence and movement.

The presentation of the book is purposeful and effective. Florence is careful not to immerse the reader into the pedagogical musings of hooks without proper contextualization. A sweeping yet informative analysis of hooks' multiple theories of social construction is initially offered that initiates the unfamiliar reader with the persona and the platform that is bell hooks. Issues of race, class divisions and gender inconsistencies mark the initial chapter of this book. It is from this socially constructed, theoretical foundation that hooks' definition and vision of education can be best understood.

From this social foundation, Florence takes the reader deep into the writings of hooks as they pertain exclusively to the field of education. What is revealed is, at times, an incredibly complex web of social forces that indeed impact education. At times, hooks can be obtuse and convoluted; she can be hard to process and digest. Yet, at times, she can be incredibly straightforward – almost simplistic – in her educational philosophies. Though inherently open to interpretation, I would argue that hooks defines education as an engagement of both complimentary and competing ideals that, more often than not, share the simple goal of personal enrichment and personal power.

And it is to this definition of enrichment and power that Florence adds an especially welcomed twist. The author takes hooks' social (including pedagogical) theories and transposes them within a Third World context. Though this is a natural bridge, given hooks' engagement in issues of social justice and inequality, this chapter is, nonetheless, a wonderful contribution to what is the power and promise of bell hooks.

The only major hurdle that this work presents is in its accessibility. True to form for a critical theorist, Florence feels compelled to utilize a discourse that is quite verbose. Though some would call this form of delivery "linguistically enlightening," I would call it needless verbiage. Florence (and hooks) would surely argue that words – both spoken and written – are a direct means of achieving access and power. In essence, words can transgress. Yet the reality is that often, through the tireless verbosity of many critical theorists (Florence included), access is not being achieved and often readers are not empowered but are essentially powerless. Overall, I found this form of pedantry overtly egotistic, excessively limiting, and, at times extremely annoying.

Language aside, this is still a well-conceived and well-presented

analysis of the theoretical underpinnings that shape the pedagogical musings of bell hooks. It is rich in its narratives, thorough in its supporting arguments, and inspirational in its ideals. For at its core, education is about movement. And it is also about personality and power. Through hooks, we see, feel, and conclude that, education is this, indeed, yet it can be so much more. If only we transgress.

Timothy Lintner