

Volume 32 Issue 1

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

rcééa

BOOK REVIEW

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
Editor-in-Chief: Robert Mizzi
www.cjsae-rceea.ca

32,1 April/avril 2020
ISSN 1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
www.casae-aceea.ca

TEACHING RACE: HOW TO HELP STUDENTS UNMASK AND CHALLENGE RACISM

Stephen D. Brookfield, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California, 2019, 368 pages.

Teaching Race is an edited book curated by adult educator and scholar Stephen Brookfield. The authors of the book come from a variety of backgrounds such as psychology, music therapy, social work and adult education but the majority of the authors are University professors in the United States. The main objective of the book is bridging the realms of theory and practice, and so “this is not a book of analysis (although there certainly is an analysis in here) but a book of *action*” (Brookfield, 2019, p. xv). The authors materialise this objective through the pedagogical tools they offer to adult educators wishing to teach race in their classrooms.

The book is for adult educators wishing to teach race in an anti-racist manner that utilises already ‘tested’ techniques, exercises, tools, and activities by the authors (Brookfield, 2019). These pedagogies generate learning opportunities for readers within the realm of praxis, and they are meant to be “stolen.” Brookfield permits this act of thievery and reminds the reader of the interactive and situated nature of learning. Adult educators learn pedagogy from each other, their teaching contexts, students and their scholarly activities across time and space. Brookfield urges the reader to read through the book with a “burglar’s eyes, always on the lookout for something to steal”, or something to “adapt and experiment with” in one’s own teaching context (p. xvii). This call for thievery is part of a political project aimed at racial justice through anti-racist education and pedagogy. Brookfield advises the reader to steal as he did in order to engage in this important work. He cautions, however, that the pedagogies in the book are not recipes which can be followed with precision to achieve an end result or teaching goal. Rather, this book is a starting point for adult educators wishing to take on the topic of race with their students. Adult educators are encouraged to use their expertise, imagination and creativity in utilising the practical knowledge offered in the chapters. In this political and anti-racist teaching project, the only element of certainty is related to one’s willingness to foster conditions of potential transformation.

The pedagogies in the book encapsulate creative teaching modules for adult educators and students. The first chapter defines some key terms related to race and explicates three key dynamics related to race-based teaching (Brookfield, 2019). Chapters two and three explore teaching in relation to two distinct subject-positions (i.e. black identified male professor and white identified female professor) and the pedagogy of journal writing amongst others (Yancy, 2019; Hadley, 2019). Chapter four prompts educators to create brave spaces (as opposed to safe spaces) through student writing and social media (Pawlowski, 2019). This theme is also addressed in chapter five through the exercise “I am from...”, which is “a tool

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*

32,1 April/avril 2020

ISSN1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

for analyzing the social construction of intersectional identity that addresses racism and other inequities in the classroom” (Klein, 2019, p. 87). Chapter six explores the complexities of “Building Trust and Negotiating Conflict When Teaching Race” (Barnett, 2019). The learning environment is the focus of chapter seven, and educators are prompt to research their students to generate safe and productive spaces conducive to learning (Merriweather, Guy & Manglitz, 2019). The authors in chapter eight help students learn about the deep embeddedness of racism, white supremacy and colonialism through working alliances (Cavalieri, French & Renninger, 2019).

In Chapter nine, Smith encourages students to examine their racial identity and white supremacy and privilege through community building (2019a). In chapter ten, Brookfield shares “six specific discussion protocols [that] can be adapted to the analysis of racial issues” (p. xix). Chapter eleven uses Critical Race Theory to inform “Teaching Against Color Blindness” (Yanow, 2019). Chapter twelve pushes students to uncover their positionalities using several pedagogies such as learning histories (Ramdeholl & Jones, 2019). Chapter thirteen examines digital storytelling as a way to unearth racism and white supremacy for liberatory action (Hess, 2019). The last two chapters challenge anti-racist educators to accept the inevitability of mistakes in anti-racist praxis, and to consider them as learning opportunities (Smith, 2019b; Brookfield, 2019).

Brookfield urges adult educators to take on a radical ontology by acknowledging the inevitability of mistakes and the absence of pedagogical perfection (2019). In a section he entitled “The Ontology of Teaching Race—Nothing Works”, he argues that the “fundamental reality and experience of teaching race is feeling as if you’re not getting it right” due to the difficulties of this pedagogic project (p.14-5). There is no pedagogical linearity, control, neutrality or certainty. Under this ontological premise of failure, he asks, “so how do we fail well?” (p.293). He contends that “simply having the conversation is an indicator of classroom success and keeping it going is a sign that you are an exemplary teacher” (p.16). Success is rendered through the continuity of anti-racist education. Educators are encouraged to create brave, anti-racist spaces for their students and to be brave role models in teaching race and generating anti-racist learning.

The adult education community in Canada will find the book a significant contribution to pedagogy and anti-racist education. The book can help adult educators in academe and beyond develop pedagogies in their teaching spaces that are engaging, creative and diverse. Adult educators can learn how to address the challenges of teaching race in a social context marked by racism, white supremacy and ideological thinking. While the book speaks to anti-racist adult education in the American context, little is known about the complexities of anti-racist pedagogy and learning in international settings beyond the United States. This discussion can render visible the limitations and possibilities of pedagogy from an international perspective that is cognisant of differing socio-political and educational contexts. Nonetheless, *Teaching Race* is an important contribution to anti-racist education for adult educators in North America and is a useful book in anti-racist pedagogy.

Wesal Abu Qaddum
University of Toronto/OISE