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Incorporating Social Justice Education into Teacher Education: A Book Review of Communicating Social Justice in Teacher Education: Insights from a Critical Classroom Ethnography

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Abstract

Aubrey Huber's book is of great value to aspiring and current educators alike, providing a comprehensive analysis of how qualitative critical classroom ethnography can be applied to support social justice in the field of education. Through this text, readers will gain an understanding of the unique opportunity that classroom ethnography provides in terms of utilizing it as an actionable mechanism to respond to social injustices while balancing intertwined multiple perspectives. Teacher educators who use this text will obtain a deeper appreciation for the instrumental role qualitative research such as classroom ethnography plays in improving and reforming education. All in all, Huber's text is an apt resource for anyone looking to integrate a critical lens and create meaningful social change in teacher education.

Keywords

qualitative research, critical classroom ethnography, social justice, teacher education

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Incorporating Social Justice Education into Teacher Education: A Book Review of *Communicating Social Justice in Teacher Education: Insights from a Critical Classroom Ethnography*

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Aubrey Huber's book is of great value to aspiring and current educators alike, providing a comprehensive analysis of how qualitative critical classroom ethnography can be applied to support social justice in the field of education. Through this text, readers will gain an understanding of the unique opportunity that classroom ethnography provides in terms of utilizing it as an actionable mechanism to respond to social injustices while balancing intertwined multiple perspectives. Teacher educators who use this text will obtain a deeper appreciation for the instrumental role qualitative research such as classroom ethnography plays in improving and reforming education. All in all, Huber's text is an apt resource for anyone looking to integrate a critical lens and create meaningful social change in teacher education.

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Main Idea and Book Structures

The title of this book identifies the subject matter to be focused on, which is the utilization of critical ethnography in instructional settings, particularly those associated with teacher education. This book aims to stoke a discourse on how these methods can create an equitable scholastic environment and consequently drive forth social justice within education. The basic premise of the book is that all students, regardless of their social or economic status, should have access to a quality education. This is an important issue, as many students, including those from low-income communities or underdeveloped countries (Tikly & Barrett, 2011), are often left behind in the educational system. The author argues not only the need for implementing social justice in classrooms but also ways in which this might be done. This is an important book for educators who are interested in promoting equity in education by using critical ethnography.

The book consists of six chapters, with concluding comments offered as the final chapter of the book. Chapters one through five are devoted to discussions surrounding means for communicating need for help, critical classroom ethnography, teacher altruism, self-reliance, and professionalization of human resources. The first chapter offers an overview of different ways that teachers can communicate effectively with students who may be struggling with course content. The second chapter suggests ways for how teachers might use ethnographic methods to better understand their students. The third chapter explores the concept of teacher altruism and how it can be used to promote social justice in the classroom. The fourth chapter proposes methods that teachers might use to cultivate self-reliance amongst their students. Finally, the fifth chapter looks at how to maximize results when delegating non-academic student issues to outside resources. It uncovers a range of potential risks and benefits of outsourcing, assessing each from various points of view.

Chapter 1: In recent years, the concept of social justice has become increasingly important in education. While the origins of social justice can be traced back to the civil rights movement, the term has come to encompass a broad range of issues related to equality and opportunity (Bennett, 2001). One of the key components of social justice is ensuring that all students have access to a quality education. This requires that teachers be aware of how they constitute help within the classroom. That is, it is not enough for teachers to simply provide assistance when needed; they must also ensure that this help is equitably distributed. Failure to do so can result in perpetuating existing inequalities. By working to promote social justice in their classrooms, teachers can play a vital role in creating a more just and equitable society.

In this chapter, the author provides readers with a comprehensive approach to writing ethnographic-style scientific articles by leveraging an in-depth analysis of familial background and motivations for pursuing social justice. Through their insightful presentation of the ethnography style, the author offers readers a tangible opportunity to explore various ways to develop their own scholarly works while helping them better understand her background coupled with a passion for equity and fairness.

It is widely accepted that quality education is essential for success in life. However, not all students have access to a quality education. This is especially true for students from low-income communities, who often attend underfunded schools and lack the resources that their wealthier peers take for granted. Personal or cultural factors have often been referenced as factors that add to the educational disparities between rich and poor students (Bennett, 2001). In other words, the educational system is designed in a way that benefits wealthy students and leaves less privileged students behind. In order to address the existing inequities, the author emphasizes the importance of implementing a critical ethnography in teaching and learning.

In chapter one, the author also defines social justice in accordance with her own convictions and this definition serves as a crucial foundation for all subsequent discussions throughout the text. She states that,

[S]ocial justice is a process of identifying micro and macro practices that support and maintain ideological systems that function to directly or indirectly ignore, dismiss, exclude, or oppress particular groups of people, while simultaneously strategizing ways to interrupt, subvert, and transform such practices. (Huber, 2022, p. 8)

In building a case for how social justice may be honored in classrooms, the author builds a case for the importance of using open-access books so that students are not burdened with book costs. Open-access books are freely available online for anyone to use. This format of textbook is especially beneficial for students from low-income families because they would otherwise be unable to afford the high cost of traditional textbooks. By using open-access books, teachers can help level the playing field for all students, regardless of their economic background. Additionally, in stressing the importance of understanding the learners' perspectives as a key component of social justice, the author provides support for incorporating storytelling. Storytelling can help teachers understand the students' points of view and disrupt and reimagine how education might work.

Chapter 2: In chapter two, the author discusses the utility of critical classroom ethnography in social justice pedagogy as well as the benefits of it for social justice. She explains how critical ethnography can be used to raise awareness of existing inequalities and to promote social justice by highlighting the voices of those affected by such inequalities, raising awareness of different perspectives based on lived experiences. Additionally, the focus on "emancipatory goals" (p. 21) provides a new way of thinking about alternative solutions that are beneficial for movements towards achieving equity and treating all individuals fairly.

In establishing the importance of critical classroom ethnography, the author stressed her own positionality as an intermediary for members in the studied community. She aimed to be conscientious, refraining from making decisions that could potentially lead to unequal power dynamics. Moreover, she suggested utilizing teacher altruism, introducing principles of student independence, and recognizing that commodification contributes certain advantages to curriculum. She also explained that ethnography allows researchers to gather in-depth information about how inequality manifests itself in everyday life, facilitating the development of new insights into the lived experiences of marginalized students. These insights can then be used to inform and improve educational practices and policies.

Chapter 3: In this chapter the author argues that to effectively teach social justice in the classroom, educators need to employ a student-centered teaching style and ensure that learning is linked to students' preparation for the real world (Niemi & Niu, 2021). By relating the content of the lessons to real-life situations, students are more likely to engage with and attach value to the material (Niemi & Niu, 2021). Furthermore, scaffolding should be considered as an important element of caring in the classroom. Scaffolding is a process of providing support for students as they build cognitive connections between what they already know and what they want to learn. When scaffolding is done well, it can help all students, regardless of background or ability level, to be successful learners. By using this teaching strategy, educators can create classrooms that are spaces where social justice can flourish.

Chapter 4: This chapter attempts to build a case for how educators might nurture self-reliance amongst their students by promoting students' self-efficacy. This trend emphasizes the importance of helping students so that they can help themselves. By teaching students how to advocate for themselves and granting them opportunities to do so, teachers can empower their students to become agents of change in their own lives. Since self-efficacy has been closely linked to improved academic performance, problem solving competency, learning motivation (Niemi & Niu, 2021) and raising students' belief in their ability to succeed is foundational. Educators can promote self-efficacy amongst their students through their communication style. A removed "tough love" (p. 38) approach may be appropriate for some students who need to feel confident in their ability to work independently. However, for other students, an engaged nurturing approach may be more successful. By creating conditions for independent work, educators can help students develop the self-efficacy necessary for autonomous problem solving, a skill necessary for success in life.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, the author offers guidance on how to decide when it is most appropriate and beneficial to bring external support into the fold. Unambiguously helpful, this segment provides exemplary insight into optimizing practices related to using outsourcing for resolving student problems that are beyond academics. When it comes to dealing with non-academic problems in the classroom, there are two main schools of thought among teachers. Some believe that it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide support for students on issues such as mental health, social justice, and so on. After all, they argue, teachers are the adults in the room and should be able to provide guidance on a variety of topics. However, others argue that related professionals such as counselors are better equipped to deal with these sorts of problems. They posit that teachers should stick to what they know best: teaching content. In this chapter, the author outlines and analyzes the pros and cons for each perspective.

Concluding Chapter: This final chapter elucidates the consequences of communicative manifestations of teacher altruism, student self-efficacy, and dependency on professional disposables for social justice pedagogy and teacher education courses. Subsequently, the author provides useful insights into how to approach implementing social justice in such settings. Specifically, her central arguments involve providing scaffolds and offering care as means to address inequity, listening skills on the part of teachers to demonstrate that they have their students' interests in mind, and helping students attain the capability to help themselves. She

further draws on Freire's (2000) philosophy by introducing a social justice logic of help that encourages closer dialogue and communication between parties while attempting to meet a shared objective.

Potential Directions for Future Development

In chapter one of the book, the author outlines the importance of using open access books. She encourages readers to take advantage of free and low-cost solutions to literature searches, stating that these can be particularly helpful for students from underprivileged families. However, there are still some hurdles to overcome before open access books can be widely used. One issue is that many students in rural areas do not have access to laptops or computers (Howley et al., 2011) which are necessary to access these books. Another issue is that even in schools where computers are available, they are often not provided in classrooms, meaning that students have to take turns using them. Finally, open access books are only effective if the quality of education is consistent across different areas. Since access to technology is still limited (Howley et al., 2011), open access books may not offer a viable solution. A detailed discussion of the link between social justice from and socio-economic background of learners is vital particularly if the suggestion is expected to have global implication (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). While the book offers a brief overview of critical ethnographic research, I wonder how to explore more the connection between this method and technology integration in the classroom.

Final Thoughts

The book attempts to offer the readers a new perspective on how social justice might be honored and implemented in the classroom through critical ethnography. The author has succeeded in communicating the idea of social justice that should be applied by pre-service teachers and graduate teaching assistants in the US. This book is written using the social justice framework to enhance pre-service teachers' understanding of their roles as change agents along with making them aware of their responsibility in promoting social justice issues. Through vivid examples and narratives, the author demonstrates how pre-service teachers can use their personal experiences to engage critical ethnography method. The book will be useful to pre-service teachers who may struggle with conceptualizing their own potential for contributing to social justice in education. It is also a useful resource for those who are interested in learning ethnography in classroom settings. Overall, this book provides an important contribution to the literature on critical classroom ethnography and social justice in education.

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Author Note

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