

BOOK REVIEW

Freebody, K., Goodwin, S., & Proctor, H. (Eds.) (2019). *Higher education, pedagogy and social justice: Politics and practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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THE AMBIGUITY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS

A relatively new collection of studies, *Higher Education, Pedagogy and Social Justice: Politics and Practice*, published in 2019, approaches the term social justice from quite a fresh perspective in order not to make it more elusive, as they claim, but to clarify the possible differences it implies. On the other hand, all the contributors to the volume come from the field of social work and pedagogy which means that their goal is to give additional value through practice and practicalities to the readers and would-be teachers. The book is edited by Kelly Freebody, Susan Goodwin, and Helen Proctor, renowned Australian university researchers, and educators. The book is divided into two sections: the first discusses the theoretical backgrounds of social justice, bringing attention to the ever-present conflict between the country's past and present, while the second includes inside-the-class and fieldwork experiences. The "Introduction" is written by Goodwin and Proctor, they argue that social justice lectures "have not always been ... a valued objective of universities" (p. 1), just as this discourse often tends to obscure rather than clarify motivations.

The first essay, Raewyn Connell's "Thoughts on Social Justice and Universities", is crucial for all readers to provide the essential framework in which the whole book oscillates. Connell tears into the past of Australia, placing the reader into the nineteenth century, then she focuses on the entrenched privileges of Australian universities. She claims that at the time, these apexes of learning were the proxy sites of the imperial British elite, and this is still the situation. Universities were meant to control the poor. With the recital of Plato and then Rawls, Connell lists three items, material distribution, recognition and respect, and sustainability, that play key parts in the advancement of the subaltern groups in Australia. The other side of the problem is the corporate-style management of the Universities that favour elitism and cement inequalities. Moreover, Connell emphasizes that the solution lies in collective action

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taken by university workers. As she argues “social justice should be central” (p. 35) for the whole society.

Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes, Valeria Harwood, and Nyssa Murray’s article, titled “On Settler Notions of Social Justice: The Importance of Disrupting Colonising Narratives”, brings practicalities besides the theory, which is most welcomed as theorizing often lacks down-to-earth reality. The first part of the text elaborates on the harsh conditions of the Indigenous populations’ exclusion in a general sense and from higher education. Poverty, segregation, and oppression widened the already huge gap between the colonizers and the Indigenous peoples. Then the authors in particular turn to the Arendtian approach to responsibility, although there is an innate tension between Arendt’s concept and the colonial narrative. According to Arendt, thinking should be done with responsibility, if this is not the case, then the agent is thoughtless. The writers of the article argue that as universities do not see themselves as part of the problem of exclusion, they are thoughtless too, and the collective of university staff should be responsible and they should take action. Universities try to uphold the status quo, but the system can be disrupted from the inside. The following parts of this essay offer examples, such as the non-Native supervisor of the Native Ph.D. student where the supervisor managed to challenge her own privileges. Thus, she was able to acknowledge the credibility of Aboriginal knowledge. It happens mostly because the supervisor holds the power position in their relationship. The other two examples demonstrate motives of resistance from within and prioritization of non-academic knowledges. The author emphasizes the need for change from within, mostly because this is how the erroneous and exploitative ways of the entrenched colonial narrative can be corrected.

Deborah Hayes’ and Dona Baines’ essays continue the train of thought in regard to the theoretical background. While the first, “Making Worlds, Making Justice and the Responsibility to Live Justly on Stolen Land”, ponders on the problematics of the ontoformative attributes of knowledge, Baines’ essay elaborates the theories of Tronto’s democracy and the Gramscian concepts of resistance through the example of a case study. Ontoformativity as an attribute is demonstrated by Hayes through the metaphor of a fig tree. This fig tree represents those who are excluding the others based on any kind of arbitrary criteria, and those who are excluded too. In the authors’ view, the fig tree represents a tree, that is the static part of the symbol, though there is a layer of meaning to it, where the tree is only an anchor. However, this made-up meaning-layer is highly dynamic. In this sense, Aboriginals and their knowledges can be excluded too by those who are holding the right to decide what is authentic knowledge and what is not. The essay claims that as long as Aboriginal knowledges are excluded by the colonial narrative at the universities, their voices will remain unheard, thus the oppressive and exclusive system cannot be changed. Baines’ chapter still works with the concepts of the “have’s” and the “have not’s”, At this point, the “have not’s” are female social workers who demonstrated resistance against the exploitive profit-oriented market of care services. From the Gramscian concept of democracy underlines that resistance is the true form of democracy, Baines connects the theory of resistance, democracy, and social justice, to the current problems of the Australian society, for example, the exploitation of underpaid caretakers. Both works focus on a from within approach to reach a change in the system.

Marianne Fenech analyses the marketization of early childhood education and care and its connection to the phenomenon of social justice. Fenech’s work weaves the theory of Baines onward in connection with the social work field. According to her, there are three dimensions of



justice, economic, cultural, and political. These justices can only be achieved by interconnectedness, redistribution, and recognition and representation. The problem is the same here as in Baines's work, that the market-oriented approach to care services generates the further segregation of the already excluded groups of society. The solution lies within the wall of the universities. Again, the notion of authenticity, the right to decide, the right to exclude are all playing key roles in this work, as terms of recurring obstacles in front of the secluded segments of society. Political justice can be obtained with state intervention against profit orientation, and universities can help to bring change with reforms in pre-service and graduate early childhood teacher's training. I hold with Fenech in their thoughts, though these changes need not years, but possibly decades.

The last paper in the first section, "Aboriginal Voices: Social Justice and Transforming Aboriginal Education", is by Cathy Burgess and Kevin Leow. The authors first explain the political background of the Rudd and Turnbull governments in connection with reconciliation and education programs for children, then they turn towards Nancy Fraser's theory of the three justices, political, economic, and cultural, cross-referencing Fenech's essay. Denial of the Aboriginal voices is still one of the core tenets of the obstruction of these three justices, while according to Burgess and Leow, relationship-based curriculum, different pedagogical practices, and the inclusion of the Indigenous education narrative should be the key practical factors. They introduce the Indigenous standpoint theory too which promotes the connection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges in order to facilitate a more just environment. Then the authors elaborate on the importance of the three key elements, bringing examples for the sake of better understanding. Burgess and Leow then move on to explain the various economic advantages of a better and more just educational system, nevertheless, it cannot be achieved without the disruption of the western success-oriented approach. As they underline, Native language education and upkeep of the local identities are the crucial factors to have a more just society, thus a whole-school reform approach is adamant.

"Pedagogies and Practices" is the title of the second section of the book. While the first section offered the main overview of the educational system, the second focuses on direct pedagogical tools and the praxis. Case studies and examples point beyond the unique problems and situations of Australian pedagogy and present possible tools for anyone interested in or working in the field of pedagogy. Emma Tseris' opening essay approaches the situation of Indigenous peoples from the perspective of mental health. This work is easier to digest if we link it together with Michelle L. Bonati's essay, titled "Social Justice and Students with Intellectual Disability: Inclusive Higher Education Practices". The two papers investigate the problematic nature of labelling from the psychiatric tradition, and the extreme challenges of students with intellectual disabilities. Tseris explores the real-life experiences of hospitalized Aboriginal patients. She argues that these people go through dehumanizing and inhumane treatments, moreover, they suffer from mental labels. According to her, the individualistic, western society should shift towards the ancient community- and storytelling-based method of the Aboriginals to deal with mental health issues. Tseris also focuses on the importance of the curriculum for social worker students, as a better program may give the would-be social workers a more complex toolset to understand such a vague problem. This links Tseris' work to Bonati's essay which deals with the conditions of students with intellectual disabilities at universities. She focuses on the removal of the unnecessary barriers that exclude such students in order to give a chance to an excluded group of society to receive a university education. The essay promotes



numerous solutions, such as lip service or developing cultural experiences among university staff.

Alexandra McCormick's and Matthew A. M. Thomas' study highlights another crucial segment of pedagogy and education: undergraduate training. Their primary focus is how to bring the demanding subjects of global challenges and social justice into the classroom. Three aspects are tackled: identification of global issues, secondly, the method itself, how to formulate questions, and lastly, "how can we facilitate critical engagement, yet not inquire complete disillusionment" (p. 139). The goal of the course is to enhance the students' critical thinking and cultivate a critical appraisal of the world. The authors' conclusion regarding a social justice course at the university is that such courses have a positive impact on students and propose that it is mandatory to dismantle the erroneous way of the entrenched colonial narrative.

Margot Rawsthorne's paper cross-references with Tseris' and Burgess' and Leow's essays in a way that emphasizes the importance and role of the local communities in the education of Indigenous peoples. Her focus falls on the teaching practices of social justice at the universities of Australia. According to her, the key is in the method of community-based learning, which concentrates on deep and active listening, and respectful relationships. More fortunate students target elite universities to cement their privileges, thus conserving power relations. Rawsthorne elaborates on the possible improvements for the disadvantaged communities, mentioning the Glebe community as an example, and the key role of social workers and pre-service teacher students. She concludes that community-embedded learning is critical to disrupt the colonial narrative, it is a form of resistance, a reference to the "On Settler Notions of Social Justice" essay, and a tangible tool to re-politicize learning practices.

Remi Yi Siang Lee brings an example of classroom resistance, titled "Little Ego Deaths", and the educator's strife to promote social justice. Lee traces the source of resistance to Freudian psychoanalysis as a form of disavowal and repression. Educational institutions reinforce social inequalities, as students may be privileged whether they acknowledge it or not. Though I have my concerns to label those who are not privileged in their life but are accepted into a university as "privileged", in this regard, this essay does generalize. According to Lee, it should be the aim of the educator to make students more self-aware through the right classroom discussion. It is crucial for the educator to re-learn their ego too, and be open to challenges, but she fails to afford hints or examples about how such challenging questions should be answered. The study brings forward a rather essential topic, however, it lacks factual experience or the possible pedagogical method to deal with them.

Allison Grove O'Gray's paper is the one but last in the book. She focuses on drama and drama pedagogy to teach students about social justice and human rights, in the context of intersectionality and social justice. This chapter does not rely solely on theories or theorization, the much-needed praxis comes forward too. O'Grady's goal is "to prepare students to navigate an uncertain and chaotic future" (p. 197), through drama pedagogy and to enhance their abilities to bring changes into the system from within. Moreover, this method can be effective to improve the acceptance of disabled students at universities. The author suggests that this program should be integrated into the pre-service teachers' curricula.

Kelly Freebody's essay closes not only the second section but the all-compassing arch of the book. The frame of this chapter is a prime example of good storytelling, while she manages to explicate the concept of prejudice in education. This is part of the bigger problem which is social



injustice. “[w]hat education for social justice looks like” (p. 228), Freebody asks, and her answer is to improve teacher training’s curriculum. She identifies four components for the implementation of social issues in the classroom, and then the explanations follow too. The author continues to put emphasize sympathy, which according to her, removes self-interest, despite the importance of empathy. Empathy is key to reducing prejudice, but it would be more effective to shift from it to sympathy. Sympathy would be the core attribute for teachers to achieve change from within.

The book presents the core ideas and issues of social justice, injustice, and challenges in the classroom to even those who are not experts in the field of pedagogy. Also, specialists can be entertained by the volume in order to give a push to the academic discourse, to challenge the still-lingering issues of colonial narrative and exclusion of Aboriginals, and to raise the much-needed awareness not from the perspective of the students, but for the educators too. The issues can be regarded as specific challenges to this given field, though it would be better to approach these from a much general perspective. Nevertheless social (in)justice can be seen as a global issue, and this book focuses only to a segment of the whole, it is wise to at least think through our own part and responsibility in the topic, more specifically to those people who are working in related fields.

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