



Designing Transformative Multicultural Initiatives: Theoretical Foundations, Practical Applications, and Facilitator Considerations

Watt, Sherry K., ed.
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Book Review

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Sherry K. Watt has assembled talented “conscious scholar practitioners” to address the growing need to design university policies, programming, and classroom pedagogies that address difference. This book addresses both the theoretical and practical aspects of multicultural teaching. As the preferred term “conscious scholar practitioners” suggests, both aspects are vital for developing multicultural policies and teaching practices. Watt explicitly places the book within the model of radical pedagogy most commonly associated with Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and bell hooks’ conception of teaching for liberation. The challenge of the book is to translate the theoretical principles of this tradition into policies that shape institutions and to provide practical models for how these principles can be actualized on today’s university campuses.

The book is organized into four parts. The first part lays out the guiding principles for transformative multicultural initiatives. Here the main terms found throughout the volume are laid out clearly and the general theoretical ground is set. Part two moves to the practical question of design and provides helpful tools that should be used during the beginning phases of design as well as how best to evaluate such programs at their conclusion. Since assessment is often difficult to conceive of in the midst of radical pedagogical models, this section struck me as particularly helpful for navigating such a pedagogy within the managerial space of the contemporary university. Part three provides six case-studies in which conscious scholar practitioners present their own programs. This is a valuable section because of the examples given, but perhaps most importantly because they offer valuable lessons learned in their unflinching self-analysis of their programs. Part four provides important reflections on the

institutional challenges that exist for those trying to carry out the programs advocated and modeled in the volume. While reading this chapter I had hoped for more constructive advice for dealing with the various forms of institutional and individual resistance to multicultural initiatives, but many of the stories in these chapters highlight the main forms of resistance to radical pedagogical models in the contemporary university.

This volume is not specifically directed towards educators in theology and religious studies. However, all of the chapters are intended to be adaptable to various contexts. For those scholars who want to deepen and center difference in their classroom and across their university this book strikes me as incredibly valuable. For departments of theology and religious studies seeking to form stronger links with other departments, staff members, and administrators, this volume can provide a common vocabulary and methodology. The volume may in fact be most valuable as a model that can facilitate interdisciplinary work as special attention is paid to multicultural initiatives within the physical and mathematical sciences. These fields are often neglected in radical pedagogy models, but as theologians and scholars of religion are encouraged to carry out more interdisciplinary teaching this volume may help frame such work within radical pedagogical models.

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