

TEACHING FOR DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Sourcebook

edited by

**Maurianne Adams
Lee Anne Bell
Pat Griffin**

Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice

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PREFACE

This is the book we wish had been available when we began teaching courses on issues of oppression twenty years ago. In this book we address both theoretical and practical issues that confront faculty who introduce diversity and social justice content in their classrooms. The book provides a unified framework for helping students understand and critically analyze several forms of social oppression including racism, sexism, heterosexism, antisemitism, ableism, and classism, as well as the parallels and interconnections among them.

Social justice education includes both an interdisciplinary subject matter that analyzes multiple forms of oppression (such as racism and sexism), and a set of interactive, experiential pedagogical principles that help students understand the meaning of social difference and oppression in their personal lives and the social system. In an increasingly abrasive and polarized American society, social justice education has the potential to prepare citizens who are sophisticated in their understanding of diversity and group interaction, able to critically evaluate social institutions, and committed to working democratically with diverse others.

We have designed this sourcebook for use in higher education (black studies, women's studies, teacher education, sociology, psychology, student affairs and diversity curricula for general education programs), adult formal and non-formal education, and workplace diversity and staff development programs. It can also be adapted for upper-level high school courses.

This book reflects twenty years of collaboration among several generations of faculty and graduate students. Much of our early work on diversity and social justice was intuitive, but, as we grounded our practice in the emerging anti-oppression and social justice literatures, we developed an approach that interweaves theory and practice. Most of the contributors have studied and taught together as graduate students and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst School of Education. All have shared in developing a common body of theory and practice.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section consists of four chapters that lay out the theoretical foundations and frameworks upon which our practice is based. Chapter 1 situates our understanding of oppression and social justice in the broader literature, while chapter 2 lays out the specific conceptual foundations for our courses. Chapter 3 reviews themes and principles from various pedagogical frameworks that form the roots of our practice, and chapter 4 describes the principles of design we use to construct social justice education curricula.

Part II consists of curriculum designs that illustrate our approach. In chapter 5 we provide a format and specific activities introducing key concepts that are used in all of the following curriculum designs. Chapter 5 also presents the assumptions and goals that underpin the curriculum designs that follow in chapters 6–11. Given the understandable temptation for instructors to move directly to the specific curriculum designs that may interest them, we strongly encourage readers to read chapter 5 first and use it in conjunction with the following six designs. Chapters 6–11 present curriculum designs on specific single issue topics: Racism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Antisemitism, Ableism, and Classism. Each of these chapters pro-

vides structured activities and handouts. Citations are gathered at the back of the volume, followed by a selective list of video resources organized by topic. Chapter 12 presents a curricular overview for a course that includes multiple topics introduced sequentially within a semester format and discusses how such a course fits into a general education curriculum. This chapter also addresses issues of grading, feedback, and building a community of instructors.

The curriculum designs described in chapters 5–12 are based on actual courses that we offer for undergraduate general education and teacher education credit and as graduate courses in the Social Justice Education Program. These single and multiple issue courses are taught by faculty like the authors, or advanced graduate students who have completed coursework in the program that covers content similar to that in chapters 1–4, 13–15.

Part III examines additional issues and challenges for social justice education. Chapter 13 discusses specific facilitation issues that arise in social justice courses and provides practical strategies to address classroom process. Chapter 14 examines what we need to know about ourselves in order to be effective teachers of this content. Chapter 15 explores what we need to know about our students. These three chapters use examples from our own practice to illustrate problems and issues that arise in social justice teaching with suggestions for how to address them, and pull together many of the themes and issues discussed in earlier chapters.

We hope that what we have written will be of use to both novice and experienced social justice educators. The curriculum designs are written in a step-by-step format, which can be easily followed or modified. Instructional activities that are described in one chapter and used in others, are cross-referenced and indexed. The single issue curriculum designs include commentary on the structure of the activities as well as discussion of facilitation and processing issues that may arise during the course. Information for lectures and historical timelines are included in the text or in Appendices. The readings assigned to our students are listed at the end of the volume, along with video resources and citations.

The curriculum designs are structured in the format of an introductory module plus four modules that can be taught over a two and one-half day period. A diagram suggesting how these designs might be revised to fit a more traditional once- or twice-a-week semester format is also provided at the back of the book. Instructors may use the curriculum designs with the diagram to mix and match activities from a variety of chapters. They may also choose to create their own designs, using the foundation and conceptual tools provided in Part I. Instructors who are preparing to teach, or are already teaching about issues of oppression and encountering difficulties, can draw on the practical information in Part III.

We have tried to balance specific descriptions with flexible alternatives. Our intention is to be descriptive rather than prescriptive, to provide sufficient detail so that those readers coming new to social justice subject matter or teaching process can see precisely how they might proceed and tailor curriculum designs to fit their own circumstances.

We have deliberately used clear and accessible language, and provided our own definitions where we use terms with specific meanings. We recognize, however, the complexity and fluidity of the language of social group and social identity naming. Our decision here has been to adopt terms preferred by people from targeted groups themselves: “people of color” rather than “nonwhite”; “gay, lesbian, bisexual” rather than “homosexual”; “people with disabilities” rather than “handicapped.” Specific ethnicities are capitalized but not hyphenated (African American, Asian American) and racial designations are capitalized only when used as proper

nouns (Black, Latino, White). We have asked the authors of each curriculum design to address other considerations of language usage in their respective chapters.

Our approach to teaching is primarily active and experiential. We have tried in the curriculum designs to provide sufficient instructions so that someone experimenting with this pedagogy for the first time may be successful. We have also provided in the theoretical foundations of Part I and the practical examples of Parts II and III, information to help the reader better understand the roots of this approach and strategies for using it effectively in the classroom. For example, social identity development is *described* in chapter 2, but *applied* in chapters 3, 4, 12, and 15.

There are social justice issues, such as Ageism, that we have not included in this volume because we have not yet fully developed curricula to address them. Readers may find Part I as well as the curriculum designs useful for constructing new designs to address manifestations of oppression not included in this volume, or combinations of social justice issues. We also acknowledge that there are different approaches to social justice education, some of which are noted in chapters 1 and 3.

We have tried to situate our work clearly, so that readers who hold different perspectives from ours can still locate us in a broader body of work on the theory and practice of anti-oppression and social justice education. All of the course curriculum designs we present in this sourcebook express our particular perspectives on the dynamics of social oppression. These include a belief that social groups in the United States exist within constructed and unequal hierarchies in which they experience differential access to power and privilege, resulting in an unjust and oppressive system. Difference in such a system is not neutral, but rather provides the basis for stratification among different groups of people. We acknowledge throughout this volume the ways in which students are challenged as they encounter this perspective, and we suggest ways they can be encouraged to stay engaged with this material, however difficult the process.

Our goal in social justice education is to enable students to become conscious of their operating world view and to be able to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations. As such, we find traditional lecture methods insufficient for this type of learning. Rather we call upon a variety of pedagogical practices to encourage students to actively engage with us, with each other, and with the informational materials, as they examine these topics and relate to their social world. Our hope is that students will learn to critique current social relations and to envision more just and inclusive possibilities for social life.

We look forward to an ongoing dialogue with readers about the theory and practice of social justice education. With such a dynamic field, we expect that the theory, the practice, and the language will continue to evolve.

Amherst, MA
May 1996

Maurianne Adams
Lee Anne Bell
Pat Griffin

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PART ONE

Theoretical Foundations and Frameworks

Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education

Lee Anne Bell

This chapter sets in context the approach to oppression and social justice described in this book. It provides a way for readers who approach oppression and social justice from other positions to see where we connect with, and in some cases differ from, other orientations. Our intention is to foster a broad dialogue among the many people who struggle, as we do, to find more effective ways to challenge oppressive systems and promote social justice through education.

The chapter examines the persistent and the everchanging aspects of oppression by tracing ways in which “common sense” knowledge and assumptions make it difficult to see oppression clearly. We discuss the value of history for discerning patterns that are often invisible in daily life but which reflect systemic aspects of oppression as it functions in different periods and contexts. Concepts are presented that enable us to freeze and focus on specific aspects of oppression in our teaching while remaining conscious of the shifting kaleidoscope of a dynamic and complex social process.

What Is Social Justice Education?

We believe that social justice education is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities), and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole.

The process for attaining the goal of social justice we believe should also be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change. We do not believe that domination can be ended through coercive tactics and agree with Kreisberg (1992) in a “power with” vs. “power over” paradigm for enacting social justice goals. This book focuses on developing educational processes for reaching these goals.

We also realize that developing a social justice process in a society steeped in oppression is no simple feat. For this reason we need clear ways to define and analyze oppression so that we can understand how it operates at various individual, cultural, and institutional levels. While this is inevitably an oversimplification of a complex social phenomenon, we believe that the conceptual frameworks presented here can help us make sense of and hopefully act more effectively against oppressive circumstances as these arise in our teaching and activism.

Why Social Justice Education Needs a Theory of Oppression

Practice is always shaped by theory, whether formal or informal, tacit or expressed. How we approach social justice education, the problems we identify as needing remedy, the solutions we entertain as viable, and the methods we choose as appropriate for reaching those solutions are all theoretical as well as practical questions. Theory and practice are intertwining parts of the interactive and historical process which Freire calls praxis (1970).

Articulating the theoretical sources of our approach to social justice education thus serves several important purposes. First, theory enables us to think clearly about our intentions and the means we use to actualize them in the classroom. It provides a framework for making choices about what we do and how, and for distinguishing among different approaches. Second, at its best, theory also provides a framework for questioning and challenging our practices and creating new approaches as we encounter inevitable problems of cooptation, resistance, insufficient knowledge, and changing social conditions. Ideally we keep coming back to and refining our theory as we read and reflect upon the emerging literature on oppression, and as we continually learn through practice the myriad ways oppression can seduce our minds and hearts or inspire us to further learning and activism. Finally, theory has the potential to help us stay conscious of our position as historical subjects, able to learn from the past as we try to meet current conditions in more effective and imaginative ways.

Defining Features of Oppression

Pervasiveness: We use the term “oppression” rather than discrimination, bias, prejudice, or bigotry to emphasize the pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society.

Restricting: On the most general level, oppression denotes structural and material constraints that significantly shape a person’s life chances and sense of possibility. Oppression restricts both self-development and self-determination (Young, 1990). It delimits who one can imagine becoming and the power to act in support of one’s rights and aspirations. A girl-child in the United States in 1996, for example, especially if she is poor or of color, is still unlikely to imagine herself as President of the country. Some one hundred and thirty years after the abolition of slavery,