



Book Review & Resources

Teaching Communication Activism: Communication Education for Social Justice

Joni Schwartz

City University of New York—La Guardia Community College

Frey, L. R., & Palmer, D. L. (Eds.). (2014). Teaching communication activism: Communication education for social justice. New York, NY: Hampton Press, Inc. ISBN-13: 978-1612891354

As both an adult educator and communication scholar, I was delighted to be introduced to Lawrence Frey and David Palmer's book, *Teaching Communication Activism: Communication Education for Social Justice*. This book is a welcome integration of adult education activism and the field of communication studies. Adult educators will recognize references to the work of Freire, Gutierrez, Giroux, Boal, Dewey and Darling-Hammond throughout this volume.

Written by the editors, the introduction and chapter one provide an excellent and thorough description of *critical communication pedagogy (CAP) and activism*, the theoretical framework and pedagogical perspective of the book. The editors make clear that the book's purpose is to challenge educators to address "social injustices through their teaching" (p. 33). The primary audience is college faculty particularly in the humanities and communication studies. However, this book should have broad appeal to adult educators, graduate students and educational administrators – anyone interested in the intersection of social justice and pedagogy.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One entitled "Understanding Communication Activism Pedagogy" opens with a sharply written chapter that contrasts the market driven and corporate emphasis of many communication programs with a social justice advocacy approach to the teaching of communication. It then speaks to the many risks and challenges that communication teacher-activists face in the academy. Jovanovic, in Chapter 3, discusses how through an engaged pedagogy we can teach to an ethical sensibility for justice in our students and academic settings while broaching a few of the ethical tensions involved in this type of pedagogy.

Part Two highlights examples of communication courses that infuse activism. Murray and Fixmer-Oraiz explain the process of developing an activism course curriculum and include a detailed sample syllabus. Gilbert in her chapter entitled “Performing Advocacy: Staging Marginalized Voices” describes two performing advocacy projects, one about Michigan Holocaust survivors and their shared stories and the other from the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe in South Dakota about the creation of the Crazy Horse Memorial. In chapter eight, Carey explains an environmental activism course project in the Pacific Northwest which involved students in the fight over old growth forests.

Parts Three and Four extend the conversation of *communication activism pedagogy* (CAP) as it is utilized in service-learning and global community engagement in partnerships with local public schools and community based organizations, or international NGO’s. Research projects, video and documentary forums, theatre, and digital storytelling are some of the platforms that engage the social justice issue as well as in many cases the community participants and students also.

The chapters are well sequenced presenting theory first then giving multiple examples of practice. Sometimes the reader can get muddled in the details, and in a few chapters this can be tedious. The strongest chapters include what did not work, what the authors would do differently and the tensions personally, professionally, and institutionally that they and their students faced when attempting to engage in social justice activism.

The value of this book is the interdisciplinary nature, appealing to a cross section of scholars and students. Clearly, the audience is communication scholars and educators but adult educators and activist scholars from a variety of disciplines will be interested. As a potential textbook, it provides a strong discussion of theory but also includes examples of effective practice. It is both readable and accessible to both undergraduate and graduate students. The editors’ words seem an apt way to sum up this book and this review. “This book is testimony to the fact that educators can challenge social injustices directly through their teaching” (p. 33).



Joni Schwartz is an Associate Professor and Social Activist Scholar in the Department of Humanities, City University of New York, LaGuardia Community College, NYC. Her new co-edited book, “Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens” will be published this summer (2017) by Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers.