

 **Social Justice Pedagogies: Multidisciplinary Practices and Approaches, edited by Katrina Sark**

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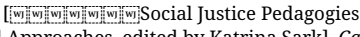
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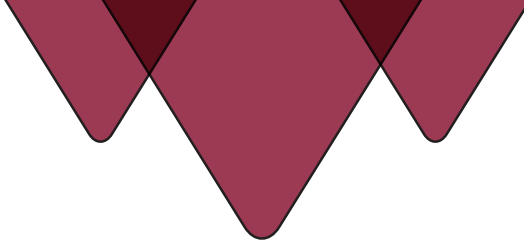
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## **Book Review: *Social Justice Pedagogies: Multidisciplinary Practices and Approaches***

Sark, Katrina, ed. *Social Justice Pedagogies: Multidisciplinary Practices and Approaches*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023, \$79.95.

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*Social Justice Pedagogies: Multidisciplinary Practices and Approaches* provides a novel and exciting contribution to the literature surrounding equity work in higher education, using a multi-disciplinary lens that showcases a range of pedagogical and institutional contexts. Over 19 chapters, contributing authors share unique stories of their equity work in academia, encompassing research and education across Indigenous studies, Holocaust studies, film studies, fashion studies, drama, social work, and more. Each chapter stands on its own as a case study of social justice pedagogies in the classroom, moving beyond theory into action, while leveraging common themes of creative problem-solving, community, technology, collaboration, and the importance of language and humility. When brought together and read as a whole, this volume provides a broad picture of the social justice landscape in academia and demonstrates a diversity of approaches and frameworks for educators and learners alike. The aim of this book, then, is to reach as broad an audience as possible, expanding how we think about the often-siloed environments which exist within academic institutions. The editor states that the authors collected in this book “want to inspire [readers] to think beyond the disciplinary, locational, logistical, financial, and creative confines of their classrooms, studios, or other professional spaces” (6).

These case studies are grounded by an introduction from the editor, bringing together the unique and varied strings of each contributor’s story. Much of *Social Justice Pedagogies* is framed by the underlying educational environment in which



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educators, students, faculty, and staff exist. Unprecedented global events such as COVID-19, the climate crisis, multiple global conflicts, and local and global human-rights movements grow more present as a backdrop to higher education. Academia has never been distinct or separate from the broader global stage, but there is growing acknowledgment of the direct and indirect roles that we play, and our responsibilities as educators in these environments. This backdrop reinforces the importance of social justice pedagogies, now more than ever, across various disciplines, subject areas, and institutions. Although challenging to meld these varied perspectives into one cohesive and compelling whole, *Social Justice Pedagogies* is successful as each story is underlined with the guiding thread of “how the contributors challenge hegemonies and aim to change traditional forms of hierarchies in educational institutions and beyond” (4).

Additionally, the introduction outlines the key pedagogical ideas and frameworks which inform the subsequent chapters. What follows is a condensed yet comprehensive literature review of foundational theories which begins with Paulo Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* up to Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo’s (2017) introduction of key concepts in *Is Everyone Really Equal?* In between, the theories and voices of Maria Montessori, bell hooks, Tracy Zinn, Brian Saville, and M.V. Lee Badger are also included. Altogether, this review demonstrates how concepts of decoloniality, intersectionality, and social justice have been intertwined with educational practice, curricula, and pedagogical trajectories over time, providing a strong foundation which runs throughout the volume. In particular, the decision to begin and end the book within the context of decolonization and intersectionality was appreciated, with the editor noting that “decolonizing pedagogical practices and learning from Indigenous expertise is at the forefront of academic progress and innovation in Canada, the US, Australia, and beyond” (15).

Finally, the closing chapter emphasizes ‘solution-based’ approaches and the importance of actionable steps, as opposed to merely falling into patterns of identifying and discussing problems without taking individual or institutional responsibility. ‘Questions for Reflection’ are included at the end of each chapter to frame the primary takeaways, applications, and theories in the reader’s unique educational context. These prompts provide helpful touchpoints for introspection, guiding the reader to think about how they can bring learning from each case study into their own work, bridging the gap from theory to action.

Across the many diverse and unique stories shared throughout this volume, my primary takeaway was the underlying theme of how social justice work is grounded in community – be that within our classrooms, our institutions, our local networks, or even globally. As a new librarian, I sometimes assume that I need to tackle my

work independently to prove my capabilities to my peers and to myself. However, I found this book to be a powerful reminder of the importance and the necessity of community in social justice and critically minded work in academia. As the editor states, “The underlying premise of this volume is that education is not a commodity, but a relational and contextual process ... each chapter provides different examples of how this relationship can be built, developed, sustained, practiced, and nurtured” (5).

This book can be a valuable resource to librarians in supporting their learning and professional development in library instruction. Many concepts and theories explored in this book overlap with discussions happening more broadly in academic librarianship, such as critical information literacy instruction, the implementation of critical reflective practices, and building instructional communities of practice. With that said, the limitation of this book is that it is not easily applicable to the informal and sometimes more constrained learning in which instructional librarians are often engaged. This work is not written from a library perspective and does not address the unique constraints or conversations happening within the field of library instruction. For example, the challenges of one-shot instruction and the ways this may limit the possibilities for meaningful critically minded work (Nicholson and Seale 2022) is not encompassed within this book. Thus, this text may be best consulted in combination with materials that provide additional consideration through a library-specific lens.

However, as an educational librarian, *Social Justice Pedagogies* also provided a thorough introduction to social justice and critical pedagogies. This knowledge will undoubtedly inform research and instruction in my work with faculty and students. This book will be equally helpful to new education librarians or those looking for a thoughtfully and intentionally curated collection of recent and diverse case studies of work in this field.

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