

bell hooks

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“The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.”

Gloria Jean Watkins

Hopkinsville, Kentucky
Born 1952

Segregated schooling → integrated schooling

Studied at Stanford and taught at Yale · Oberlin ·
City College New York

She wrote over 30 books on teaching, love, race,
popular culture, feminism, children's books

Wrote her first book at 19 in 1971

Recognised in academic circles, but mainstream
acknowledgement was slow

Died 15 December 2021

Politics & Power

Paulo Freire

- Criticism of the traditional banking model of depositing knowledge
- Education is never politically neutral
- He focused on class and economic oppression.

Holistic nature of self

Thich Nhat Hanh

- Mind, body, and spirit are inseparable
- Our Inner life matters
- Importance of being fully present

Engaged Pedagogy

"When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks."

— bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994)

Practice of Freedom

- Nothing we do in the classroom is politically neutral
- The banking model actively reinforces the hierarchies we say we want to dismantle
- Examining our positionality moves curriculum diversity from tokenism to inclusive

Wholeness & Well-being

- We arrive in the classroom as a person
- The teacher's wellbeing is not separate from their teaching
- Teachers who do their own inner work create conditions where students can grow

Engaged Community

- Engagement in the classroom is a collective responsibility
- Community is a prerequisite for learning
- All voices must be actively enabled, not just allowed
- Design for multiple ways to contribute

Intersectionality

- Identity shapes how learning is experienced - race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability
- The neutral classroom often reflects dominant norms
- Classroom dynamics can privilege certain voices and discourage others - silence is meaningful

30 years on, same conversations....

The awarding gap persists

Black students are still significantly less likely to be awarded a good degree than white students.

Performative diversity

EDI statements. Decolonising working groups. Diversity training. Are these tokenistic or changing practices.

Silence still being misread

Marginalised students are still silencing themselves in classrooms that feel unsafe.

The curriculum still centres the same voices

The reading list conversation is live in UK HE but largely still white.

The banking model persists

particularly in assessment, where students are still asked to reproduce knowledge rather than interrogate it

Reflective Practice

We reflect on how we teach. hooks asks who we are when we do

What We Can Do

Build diverse voices into curriculum from the start

Ask honestly: how am I doing?

Take the risks you ask students to take

Make your own learning visible

Meet students at their cultural and social level

Interrogate the texts you use with students, not just deliver them

Enter the room ready to learn, not just to teach

Name bias in curriculum design specifically

"The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom."

— bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994)

Key Texts

hooks, b. (1994) Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. New York: Routledge

hooks, b. (2003) Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope. New York: Routledge

hooks, b. (1999) All About Love: New Visions. New York: William Morrow

hooks, b. (2010) Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom. New York: Routledge

Further Reading

Burke, B. (2023) bell hooks on Education. infed.org/dir/welcome/bell-hooks-on-education/

Savonick, D. (2022) The Pedagogical Legacy of bell hooks. The Chronicle of Higher Education

Florence, N. (1998) Bell Hooks' Engaged Pedagogy: A Transgressive Education for Critical Consciousness. New York: Bergin & Garvey