



Teaching in the Cracks

Schultz, Brian D.
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Book Review

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Teaching in the Cracks: Openings and Opportunities for Student-Centered, Action-Focused Curriculum

Brian D. Schultz

New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2017 (xiv + 128 pages, ISBN 9780807758311, \$29.95)

Teaching in the Cracks by Brian D. Schultz, a professor of education at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, explores ways to make current K-12 classrooms more student-empowering, justice-oriented, and action-based. It is not that already available curricula are not student-empowering, have no concern for justice, or seldom inspire creative student actions; What most concerns the author are school systems that dictate almost everything that students experience, think, and do. In such a system, says Schultz, learning is largely top-down, authoritarian, controlled by agendas that perpetuate the status quo, and “bombarded by standards, assessments, [and] evaluations” (86). Schultz’s critiques and enthusiasm focus on reforming this “troubling” system and more specifically on transforming current everyday curricula in classrooms (86). His proposal, however, stays at the level of reforming or transforming, rather than completely negating or overhauling our current educational practices. That is why he calls his suggestive methodology and transformative tactics “teaching in the cracks.” He encourages educators to find creative loopholes in the present system where they can make education more democratic, collaborative, and thus bottom-up.

Schultz acknowledges that his proposal sounds great on paper but is hard to implement in the classroom, and so throughout he offers numerous practical examples of proposed curricula and how they are working around the nation. Examples vary, covering everything from a single

classroom, the entire school's curriculum, forming close partnerships with surrounding communities, and specific topics, to teacher preparation (all covered in chapters two to six). Together they make this book an invaluable reference for field educators. In particular, chapter six, "Becoming the Teacher I Want to Be: Finding Support to Teach in the Cracks," and chapter seven: "Turning the Corner: Techniques, Resources, and Tools for Taking-Action," should be helpful for those who would like to implement the proposed learner-centered class education in a seemingly impotent school context. In chapter six, Schultz gives two fine examples of veteran teachers who introduced several effective strategies that are applicable to other contexts as well. To be sure, contexts differ. Yet, as long as a similar school structure is involved (for example, executive administrators, a sizable student body and its own governing entity, supportive community groups, and an aspiring teacher), these strategies would be beneficial anywhere. Websites introduced in chapter seven are extremely useful resources too.

This book is not *per se* a theoretical book on student-centered, action-focused curriculum. Rather, it is full of vivid examples of actual current practices. Some readers may find this book insufficiently radical to make a dramatic change in the existing school system, but that is not the author's purpose. Its particular strength lies in its unabashed focus on the classroom itself. The author believes that the real change can and must happen in each individual classroom where the teacher and students meet for daily education, before any large-scale systematic change is possible. In this respect, this book provides a small, yet reliable, hope for most field educators who, like me, aspire to create a more learner-led class environment.

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