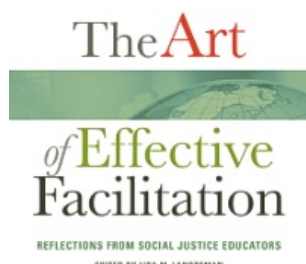


The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators



Landreman, Lisa M., ed.
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2013

Book Review

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There is a whole industry of administrative agents and auxiliary student service providers inhabiting the world of higher education bordering the classroom. Whether it is in the areas of residence life, student affairs, or service learning, practitioners provide social justice education (SJE). Inside the classroom, universities and colleges engage faculty to provide discrete courses, or enable interdisciplinary multicultural experiential learning for their students under the rubric of social justice education. Indeed, as this collection testifies, even student peer instruction can be key to unlocking conversations and attaining social justice learning outcomes.

The book's multiple authors were brought together under the aegis of the ACPA-College Student Educators International Commission for Social Justice Educators. Faculty, administrators, development support staff, and students themselves contribute a variety of chapters focusing on the task of facilitation. As the title suggests, each gives a thick description of their context to flesh out the claim that facilitation is an art rather than an exact science. This is not a simple how-to manual.

The book is organized into four sections: Frameworks from Theory to Practice; Understanding Identities and Facilitation; Facilitation Design and Techniques; and Supporting Student Social Action. One might ask, "Why should teachers of Theology and Religion care?" One attractive answer is that SJE aims at transformation and action in relation to social structures of dominance and oppression. There are underdeveloped suggestions in the text that dominant religious assumptions need examining on campus and in wider society. Certainly the investment of religious studies and theology disciplines in the questions of race and whiteness, gender, sexuality, and broadly, identity -- however controverted -- means that awareness of the

theoretical and practical bases of campus work for students is important.

To my mind, the most interesting chapters are those framed largely as dialogues between two authors. Where facilitating conversation, awareness, disclosure, negotiating triggers, and gaining empowerment is the topic, this mode of writing is immediately attractive for demonstrating what is being written discussed in a way that cannot otherwise be done.

The authors are wonderfully humane in addressing their own growth in awareness of the importance of social justice education, and their faltering steps to facilitate that growth along with their students or peers. Social justice education is about relationships and fostering learning that is transformative. Not all will agree with the account of justice that is drawn on in the book: Justice as inclusive individual identity rights procedurally secured over against hegemony is the framework. Certainly different ways of living religious traditions, with their thick accounts of the good framing what counts as just, will dispute some assumptions here. Nevertheless, or rather, precisely so, they are invited into the conversation that is facilitated. Teachers of theology and religion might take much of the wisdom accrued here into their class discussions, seminars, and workshops. Further, everyday teaching will be more attuned to the strivings toward justice in the wider higher education community.

I would have liked more discussion about ableism and people with disabilities. At times the thick description felt thin, given the constraints of what is communicable on a page: the experiential stories almost needed longer narration to draw in a reader who does not always inhabit the SJE discourse. What is in one sense a distraction for one jumping into the field -- numerous references to authoritative tomes unknown -- is at the same time a boon to the reader wanting to explore further: the chapter bibliographies are extensive and rich.

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