



Book Review

Social Justice and the Language Classroom: Reflection, Action and Transformation

Hart, D. O. (2023). Edinburgh University Press. 978-1474491754 (cloth) US\$125.00; ISBN 978-1474491761 (paper) US\$33.95; 978-1474491766 (e-book) US\$33.95. 208 pages.

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Deniz Ortaçtepe Hart's *Social Justice and the Language Classroom: Reflection, Action, and Transformation* (2023), part of the Edinburgh Textbooks in Applied Linguistics series, challenges the paradigm of the classroom as an apolitical and neutral space. This seminal work, consisting of a revealing preface and eight chapters, provides a comprehensive theoretical and practical framework for language educators to confront systemic injustice and promote equity and inclusion for linguistically and culturally diverse learners. With a global perspective utilizing examples from international contexts, the volume equips readers with conceptual tools to analyze oppression as well as pedagogical strategies, reflective tasks, lesson plans, and materials to implement transformative, social justice-oriented language instruction. Emphasizing intersectionality and global competence, this book is an essential resource for language teacher education programs aiming to cultivate advocates, allies and activists.

The book features a significant Preface that is essential reading for readers before delving into the text. It opens with a quote from James Baldwin about the ongoing need to fight against racism and oppression, despite progress made. It discusses how issues of diversity, equity and inclusion have long been of interest in language education and applied linguistics, but there has been a marked intensification of focus on social justice language education in the past decade. The author describes her own journey and motivation for writing the book, stemming from her experiences as an ethnic minority woman, dealing

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with oppression and conflict in Turkey. A classroom incident after the Parkland school shooting made her realize the need to bring real-world social justice issues into her teaching practice courses. The Preface provides an overview of the book's goals, which include helping language educators identify systems of oppression, reflect critically on beliefs, affirm student diversity, create inclusive classrooms, and take action for social change. It describes the book's structure of three main parts covering key concepts, critical themes (social class, race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality), and looking ahead. The Preface emphasizes avoiding a prescriptive approach, instead aiming to develop critical consciousness in educators to recognize oppression and adopt transformative social justice pedagogies relevant to their local contexts. It also highlights the need to decolonize knowledge by expanding beyond U.S.-centric perspectives.

Part One, titled "Language Teaching for Social Justice," comprises four chapters. The first chapter, "Social Justice and Social Justice Education" provides a thorough overview of the key concepts and theories related to social justice and social justice education. It starts by acknowledging the contested and politically charged nature of the term "social justice," while offering the author's own nuanced understanding. The chapter lays important theoretical groundwork by unpacking core ideas like ideology, hegemony, oppression, and their manifestations through interpersonal, institutional and internalized forms. Althusser's (2001) notion of ideology as unconsciously held beliefs that reinforce the status quo is clearly explained, highlighting its relevance for education as an "ideological state apparatus." The author then delves into the dual dimensions of social justice as the politics of recognition (identity, culture, respect) and the politics of redistribution (economic equity, class). Fraser's (2019) work on these intersecting yet often disconnected domains is drawn upon effectively. The critique of affirmative approaches focused on recognition alone is insightful. Throughout, the chapter makes effective use of relevant examples and analogies to illustrate abstract concepts in concrete ways. The discussion of how ideologies are conveyed through digital media technologies is particularly relevant. However, one potential critique is that while offering a strong theoretical base, the chapter could have gone further in translating these ideas into practical strategies for educators to apply a robust social justice lens in specific pedagogical contexts. Overall, this chapter achieves its aim of providing a substantive conceptual framework for understanding social justice as a multi-faceted endeavor towards equity and transformation in multiple overlapping spheres. It prepares the reader well for further examination of social justice issues in education settings.

Chapter Two, titled "Social Justice-oriented Critical Pedagogy" provides an excellent overview of the foundations and core principles of critical pedagogy, which aims to challenge oppressive power structures and inequalities perpetuated through traditional education systems. The author begins by establishing that education is an inherently political act, serving to reproduce existing societal hierarchies and dominant ideologies through the explicit curriculum as well as the hidden curriculum of schools. The chapter then

outlines the key underpinnings of critical pedagogy, including Freire's (1970) notion of "banking education" where students are positioned as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge by teachers. In contrast, critical pedagogy proposes a transformative, liberatory model of education that develops students' critical consciousness and agency to confront injustice. This involves problem-posing education, dialogue, co-construction of knowledge, and centralizing the voices and experiences of marginalized communities typically silenced in schooling. Hart then provides a nuanced discussion of the teacher's role in critical pedagogy – avoiding the "savior mentality" but creating opportunities for students' empowerment. Relevant examples effectively illustrate core concepts like how schools reinforce cultural homogenization and how a simple student pledge can carry nationalist ideological messages. Overall, this is an insightful synthesis that makes a strong case for a social justice orientation in education and equips educators with a solid grounding in critical pedagogy's key tenets and transformative aims. The writing is clear, well-organized, and substantiated with references to foundational scholars in the field. This chapter can greatly benefit those seeking to apply the principles of critical pedagogy in their teaching practice.

Chapter Three, titled "Language, Education and Social Justice," presents a thorough critical analysis of the interplay between language, power, and ideology within language education programs like English language teaching (ELT), foreign/world language education, and bilingual/multilingual education. It draws on influential works by critical scholars like Fairclough, Phillipson, Pennycook and others to examine how language policies and pedagogical practices can perpetuate existing socioeconomic hierarchies and hegemonic ideologies. The chapter begins by establishing language as a political instrument tied to conceptions of power and identity. It then delves into how the global spread of "Standard English" has roots in colonialism and capitalism, maintaining linguistic imperialism through ELT (see Phillipson, 1992). Parallels are drawn to the promotion of "standard" language varieties over regional or ethnic varieties in foreign language education as well. The author critiques the marginalization of languages and the privileging of English, especially in multi-ethnic post-colonial contexts. Approaches like linguistic imperialism, language ecology, and linguistic human rights are explored as frameworks to understand the unequal power dynamics. The chapter advocates moving beyond multiculturalism towards critical pedagogies and social justice education that decenter dominant language ideologies. Concepts like translanguaging, plurilingualism and heteroglossia are presented as liberating perspectives. In all, this chapter mounts a comprehensive critique of how language education has historically been implicated in perpetuating social inequities. It makes a strong case for transforming language pedagogies to be more inclusive, justice-oriented and decolonial.

Chapter Four, titled "Social Justice Language Curriculum," discusses social justice approaches to language curriculum and instruction. The chapter makes

a compelling case for why language education is inherently political and tied to issues of power, identity, representation, and social inequities. The chapter outlines four key strategies for integrating social justice into the language curriculum: centralizing social justice within lesson planning by formulating content, language, and social justice objectives; cultivating activism and social action projects to translate learning into change; deconstructing language learning materials to analyze whose knowledge, identities, and ideologies are represented; and reconstructing materials to develop critical literacies. A major strength is the concrete examples and reflective tasks provided to illustrate the abstract concepts. The discussion of deconstructing textbooks as economic commodities, cultural artifacts, and ideological tools is particularly insightful. Numerous research studies are cited that have found biases and marginalization in terms of race, gender, class, language variety, religion, etc. in language textbooks. Overall, this chapter provides a thorough theoretical grounding combined with practical strategies for language teachers to make their curriculum more socially relevant, critical, and transformative. It calls on teachers to view their role as not just teaching language but also cultivating learners' abilities to identify injustices and take action for positive social change. However, some potential critiques are that the chapter does not sufficiently address challenges teachers may face in implementing these approaches, especially in contexts with standardized curricula. More examples spanning different languages and contexts would strengthen its applicability. However, on the whole it is a rich resource for language teacher education around social justice.

Part Two, "Critical Themes and Frameworks," consists of three chapters. Chapter five, titled "Neoliberalism, Social Class, and Anti-classism," provides a thorough overview of the intersections between neoliberalism, social class, and language education. It begins by situating the topic within the broader field of political economy and defining key concepts like neoliberalism, roll back/roll out policies, and social class. The chapter compares and contrasts Marxist and Bourdieusian conceptualizations of social class, highlighting how both perspectives can shed light on class-based inequalities. A major strength is the chapter's nuanced discussion of how social class intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and immigrant identities. It critiques how identity politics and progressive neoliberalism have prioritized recognition over economic redistribution. The chapter makes a compelling case that failing to centralize class can undermine efforts to promote social justice in language education. The final section provides a comprehensive anti-classist, anti-neoliberal framework for language educators to analyze and dismantle classism in their teaching materials and practices. Concrete examples and guided reflection questions facilitate applying the framework. In all, the chapter offers an incisive analysis of the pivotal yet understudied role of social class in language education. Its theoretical grounding, intersectional approach, and practical framework make it a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners alike.

In Chapter Six, “Race, Ethnicity, and Antiracist Language Pedagogy,” Hart provides a comprehensive overview of the concepts of race, ethnicity, and racism, and how they manifest in educational contexts. The author effectively unpacks these complex ideas, explaining that race and ethnicity are socially constructed categories rather than biological realities. She illustrates how processes of racialization and ethnicization underpin racist ideologies and systems of oppression. A major strength is the chapter’s grounding in critical race theory (CRT) as a framework for understanding and dismantling racial inequities in education. It clearly outlines key CRT tenets like the permanence of racism, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism. Importantly, it moves beyond just defining CRT to offering specific pedagogical approaches derived from it, like developing racial literacies and centering counternarratives. The examples and reflective tasks interspersed throughout make this an accessible yet thought-provoking resource for educators. It prompts crucial self-examination about issues like implicit bias, white privilege, and being an ally versus an anti-racist accomplice. One potential critique is that while the chapter touches on intersectionality with other identities like religion and language, it could go deeper in exploring the nuances of how race intersects with other axes of oppression like gender, class, disability status, etc., in classroom contexts. Overall, this is a valuable theoretical and practical guide for language teachers committed to social justice and creating inclusive, anti-racist learning environments. Its blend of conceptual grounding and tangible strategies would make it a useful resource in teacher education programs.

Chapter Seven, titled “Social Justice Pedagogies for all Gender and Sexual Identities,” presents a comprehensive overview of social justice pedagogies related to gender and sexual identities. The author takes an intersectional approach, highlighting how gender and sexuality intersect with other identities like race, class, and ability in shaping experiences of oppression. This chapter begins by unpacking the constructs of gender and sex, problematizing the view of them as binary, fixed, or purely biological. It traces the evolution of feminist movements from early waves that centered white, middle-class women to more recent feminisms that account for diverse experiences across race, sexuality, and other identities. Relevant theoretical frameworks like diversity feminism and queer theory are discussed in depth. Queer theory in particular is highlighted as a lens to disrupt normativity around gender and sexuality. The author then advocates for expansive pedagogies that promote gender and sexual fluidity while challenging cissexism, heterosexism, and other interlocking systems of oppression. Examples of applying these pedagogies across the curriculum are provided. This chapter offers a nuanced examination of gender and sexuality through an intersectional, queer theoretical lens. Its emphasis on disrupting all forms of normativity and centering marginalized experiences makes it a valuable resource for educators committed to social justice.

Part Three, titled “Conclusion,” consists of a single chapter, “The Rough and yet Traversable Road Ahead,” which provides an insightful discussion of the challenges language educators may face when striving to enact social justice pedagogies in their classrooms. The author covers a range of pertinent issues, including concerns around ideological indoctrination, navigating difficult conversations with parents and other stakeholders, acknowledging pain and trauma in the classroom, and problematizing common phrases like “giving voice” and “teaching empathy.” One of the chapter’s strengths is its nuanced exploration of the complexities involved in creating genuinely inclusive and transformative learning spaces. The author critically examines concepts like “safe spaces,” arguing persuasively for the need to cultivate “brave spaces” that allow for discomfort, vulnerability and the unlearning of oppressive ideologies. This push to move beyond superficial celebrations of diversity towards deeper engagement with intersectional identities and systems of oppression is valuable. The practical suggestions offered, such as ways to communicate with parents and utilize powerful examples and stories in the classroom, make this a highly applicable resource for language teachers. However, the chapter could have benefited from more concrete examples of social justice-oriented lesson plans, activities or assessments to illustrate the principles discussed. Overall, this chapter offers a thoughtful and comprehensive overview of the “rough yet traversable road ahead” for language educators committed to social justice aims.

To summarize, this book undoubtedly makes several noteworthy contributions, both theoretical and practical, in the field of social justice in education in general and in language education in particular. Undoubtedly, it makes a compelling argument for the application of critical themes and approaches, including critical pedagogy, political economy, critical race theory, feminist pedagogy, and queer theory in the field of language education research that makes it serve as useful material for courses on language teacher education, curriculum development and critical pedagogy in language education.

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