

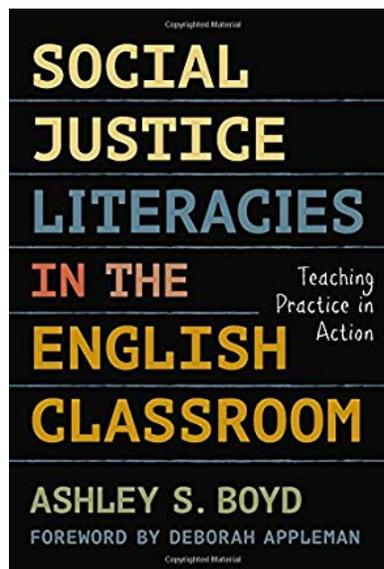
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Social Justice Literacies in the English Classroom: Teaching Practice in Action

By Ashley S. Boyd

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Social Justice Literacies in the English Classroom: Teaching Practice in Action (2017) by Dr. Ashley S. Boyd offers a distinctive look at how educators are teaching social justice in secondary English classrooms. By dividing the book into three separate facets of the educational experience—the teacher, the classroom, and beyond the classroom—the author critically examines how social justice can effectively intersect when teaching. Each chapter breaks down the intersectionality of the topics and finishes with pedagogical advice for practicing educators.

In addition to Boyd's thoughts and research, the reader explores ways to apply social justice pedagogy in a secondary setting. Included are narratives of three practicing secondary English language arts (ELA) educators and the social factors that permeate their classroom experience, such as student positionality, critical caring, and choosing texts with intention. As the book progresses, each teacher's narrative, told in accordance with the topic of the chapter, allows readers to glean for themselves the pedagogical implications for their own practice from the words of both researcher and practitioner.

Part 1 begins with an examination of social justice through theoretical and conceptual lenses. Boyd relates previous research on various topics, including social action, critical theory, and discourse analysis, to her current aim of exploring how social justice is explored in classrooms. Literacy, Boyd argues, is the perfect scaffold for teaching students about social justice because it shows students new ways to think and talk about the world in a manner that promotes equality. The marriage of social justice and ELA allows the reader to see how social justice is "first and foremost student-centered, and teachers enact their critical pedagogies with their student demographics in mind" (p. 11). Boyd, by adding critical literacy to social justice and literacy, equates these factors with being critically conscious,

which encourages students to understand the social aspects of their world. Part 1 successfully sets the stage for the rest of the book and acknowledges the importance of teachers in this process of meaning making.

Teachers have the unique ability to be agents for change. However, teachers must navigate relationships and interactions within the classroom environment. Thus, Part II focuses on how social justice is applied within a classroom setting. Once teachers take the opportunity to understand their own positionality, they can create their own understanding of social justice and then be able to truly relate to their students. Boyd's ability to explain the transformative language process creates an atmosphere of possibility and leads to critical caring. Critical caring, an aspect of building relationships with students, takes into consideration students' backgrounds and then compels them to be successful (p. 53). This disposition gives teachers the opportunity to get to know their students as people and not just someone who takes up a desk in their classroom. Being more involved with their students leads teachers to appreciate what students bring to the class no matter their background and to advocate for them as needed. In turn, the reader appreciates the need to understand why social justice is important in today's world.

Boyd connects the use of critical literacy with both traditional and essential content to social justice. These connections create authentic classroom conversations and provide the platform from which students can take the mantle of change upon themselves. The concept of social justice evolves into social action in Part III. Social action projects are not only relevant to the lives of the students that create them, but they also allow students the opportunity to challenge the status quo and disrupt social injustices. Boyd constructs a framework for social action projects created by students to

reinforce the social justice pedagogy that has already been used in the classroom. The four steps are: Contextualizing, Organizing, Acting, and Reflecting (COAR). Boyd's view of teaching equity in the English classroom lends credibility to her model for social justice action in schools.

In addition to these opportunities, Boyd addresses potential obstacles that educators might face when trying to implement social justice pedagogy in their own classrooms. Risks can range from stakeholder resistance to institutional pressure that could lead to internal self-censorship. She provides guidance on ways that educators can deal with the obstacles and continue with the mission of successful social justice pedagogy in secondary ELA classrooms. Boyd concludes the book by recapping the main points of the book and the lessons from the narratives of practicing teachers. Boyd then reiterates the support teachers need from each other and all those involved for this shift in pedagogy to be successful.

Even in a book with so many positive attributes, there were noticeable weaknesses. The first is the exclusivity of female perspectives. We see experiences through the eyes of three female teachers' diverse perspectives, but a male perspective would lend a more well-rounded lens to the book. Additionally, there are not alternative experiences given. For instance, lessons from a teacher who had to adapt social justice strategies or a teacher whose knowledge of social justice strategies was insufficient could add more credibility to the book. In the absence of less than effective examples of social justice practice, the reader may underestimate the depth and complexity of social justice practices.

The main strength of the book is Boyd's ability to engage the reader from the very beginning. With easy to understand explanations and narratives from practicing educators, as well as advice informed by

research for those interested in implementing social justice pedagogy in their classroom, Boyd's writing makes for a highly enjoyable read. The division of the book into three main sections makes Boyd's work accessible to navigate.

Social justice and social action projects are important topics in today's world, not only in education. As Appleman (2017) states in the Foreword:

the notion of teaching for social justice holds great promise for educators across the K-college spectrum. This is especially relevant in language arts classrooms, where the critical study of texts in social context and language and power can help students learn to connect their lived realities to the worlds of the text (p. ix).

Boyd's focus on social justice echoes through the book. Whether sharing advice for teachers, vignettes from real teachers' experiences, or research-based information on social justice pedagogies, the book is authentic and inspiring.

Anyone who has contact with students, regardless of subject matter taught or level of influence, should read this book. From the explanations to the narratives from real teachers, or the pedagogical suggestions, this book could easily reinvigorate or even reinvent your interaction with students. Simply put, our students need social justice literacies as a part of their education and opportunities to complete social action projects to change the world, and we recommend *Social Justice Literacies in the English Classroom: Teaching Practice in Action* by Dr. Ashley S. Boyd as an accessible resource to inform practices and being discussions. This text is a valuable read for those who are interested in implementing a

critical lens with social justice literacies in their
classroom.