

# *Becoming Community-Engaged Educators: Engaging Students within and beyond the Classroom Walls*, edited by George Jacobs and Graham Crookes

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In the field of education, critical and community-engaged pedagogy have yielded valuable educational insights. These areas illuminate how education promotes social justice, cultivates civic engagement, empowers marginalised voices, develops critical thinking, and encourages reflection and empathy (Purcell 2017; Trudeau and Kruse 2014). However, limited information is reported about how education can lead to social transformation and improvement. In this context, George Jacobs and Graham Crookes curated this book titled *Becoming Community-Engaged Educators: Engaging Students within and beyond the Classroom Walls*. This book presents a variety of sociopolitical, cultural, personal, and religious or philosophical viewpoints. However, what unifies them is their shared aspiration and significant accomplishments in promoting social betterment within a broadly democratic framework.

The book comprises nine chapters, including the introduction and conclusion by the editors. In the introduction, Jacobs and Crookes emphasise the importance of community-engaged education and its role in fostering social change and improvement.



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They introduce the concept of “community-engaged education” to signify the connection and the location for action. The authors also highlight the need for active community engagement and the challenges teachers face in reporting their practices, as well as encourage readers, particularly language teachers, to engage with the wider world outside the classroom and reflect on how they can integrate these insights into their teaching practices.

Anita Lie, in Chapter 2, shares her journey of using education to combat poverty in Indonesia, a diverse and populous nation. Growing up in a middle-class family, she reflects on the importance of education as a tool to break the cycle of poverty, starting her teaching career early and evolving to become a community-engaged educator. She emphasises the role of teachers in making a difference and discusses her efforts to influence public policies and challenge societal inequalities through her writing and projects in rural areas. Despite facing obstacles and frustrations, Anita remains committed to her vision of planting seeds for positive change through education and community engagement.

In Chapter 2, Joel Jablon discusses his journey towards embracing abolitionist teaching and antiracist pedagogy in his classroom. He reflects on how he started with small changes, such as diversifying the authors and characters in the books he teaches, which led to a broader transformation of his teaching practices. He emphasises the importance of reading and professional development, as well as engaging in self-reflection to address his own biases and prejudices. Jablon also encourages educators to build a community of like-minded colleagues to support and discuss the challenges and feelings that arise during this process. Finally, he stresses the importance of “calling in” rather than “calling out” when addressing issues related to racism and bias.

Chapter 3 discusses Yoshi Joanna Grote’s journey as a gay teacher and how she learned to bring her authentic self into the classroom. She emphasises the importance of authenticity in teaching, sharing personal stories, and being open about her LGBTQIA+ identity. Yoshi also highlights the need to create a classroom culture that challenges gender stereotypes, uses inclusive language, and supports diversity. This chapter concludes by emphasising that teaching is a political act, and the best teachers are those who care deeply about their students and bring their humanity into the classroom.

In Chapter 4, Lisa Liss reflects on her experiences with religion and diversity. She became passionate about promoting religious tolerance after reading Anne Frank’s diary and wanting to prevent another Holocaust. She went on to become a teacher, fulfilling a promise to teach Anne’s story. Her teaching career led her to address religious diversity in the classroom, and she embarked on a project to collect 1.5 million bandages to honour the children killed in the Holocaust. She encourages teachers to facilitate challenging conversations about religion and tolerance and provide opportunities for students to express themselves through reading and writing.

Linda Ruas, in Chapter 5, discusses her experiences working with refugees and how teachers can help refugees. Linda emphasises the importance of creating materials and teaching methods that empower and support refugees, address trauma and resilience, and raise awareness about refugee issues. She also discusses her efforts to counter anti-refugee rhetoric and promote understanding and tolerance among students. Finally, Linda expresses the need for more teachers to get involved in helping refugees and humanising their experiences.

In Chapter 6, Kip Cates reflects on his 30-year career as a language teacher and environmental educator. He discusses the formative influences that shaped his perspective, emphasising the importance of his physical and sociopolitical environment, especially during the environmental and social movements of the 1960s. His transition into environmental education is explored as he describes his efforts to integrate environmental themes into English language teaching. This chapter highlights the transformative impact of such educational initiatives on students and their motivation to contribute to positive change in the world. Kip concludes by emphasising the critical role of teacher training in preparing educators to incorporate community engagement and environmental education in their curricula.

Chapter 7 by George Jacobs is a reflection on his journey towards becoming an activist for farmed animals and his approach to teaching in the context of animal welfare. Despite not fitting the stereotypical activist personality, George transitioned to a vegetarian diet, primarily due to his cousin's influence and reading *Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé (1971), which highlights the inefficiency of meat production. The chapter also delves into George's use of language in teaching, the intersectionality of animal welfare issues with other social justice causes, dilemmas faced as a community-engaged educator, and the future of his work in activism and education, focusing on a two-hat approach between his roles as an activist and educator. He emphasises the importance of how teaching is conducted, not just what is taught, and its alignment with the changing paradigms in society.

The book wraps up by reiterating the experiences of various educators who are committed to making the world a better place through their teaching practices and community involvement. Jacobs highlights their unique journeys and provides inspiration and ideas for those looking to transform their teaching methods. The conclusion suggests five key recommendations: seek and nourish community, find a balance between work and personal life, take chances and be open to change, continue learning from various sources, and focus on big changes and systemic actions to address major issues.

This book showcases several commendable qualities. It notably excels in its clear and well-structured presentation of ideas, making it easily understandable to a wide audience. The chapters generally reflect a practical and experiential approach by using narrative style and case studies. Another strong point of this book is its diversity of

perspectives, which provides readers with various viewpoints and strategies for community engagement in education. Furthermore, the book underscores the authors' active engagement with professional organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other relevant groups. This reflects a commitment to making a broader impact beyond the classroom. Finally, the book highlights the importance of addressing social issues within the classroom, demonstrating that language teaching can serve as a platform for addressing broader societal problems. This emphasis on the social relevance of education is a laudable quality.

While the book offers valuable insights and ideas, there are always areas where improvement can be considered. While the chapters cover a range of topics, there could be an increased focus on diversity and inclusivity in education. This includes addressing issues related to “race”, gender, socio-economic status, and different cultural backgrounds. A more comprehensive examination of these issues and their impact on community-engaged education could enhance the chapters. The book primarily focuses on educators in North America and the United Kingdom. Including more global perspectives and experiences from educators in different parts of the world would provide a more comprehensive view of community-engaged education in diverse cultural and educational contexts. It might be insightful as well to incorporate student voices in the chapters. The perspectives and voices of students who have been part of community-engaged education programmes would provide a more well-rounded view of the impact of such initiatives. Despite these areas that could be enhanced, this book stands as a valuable resource for educators seeking to create positive social change through community-engaged education. The authors effectively shed light on the potential directions for advancing this field theoretically and pedagogically. Undoubtedly, this engaging scholarly work merits a strong recommendation.

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