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Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education

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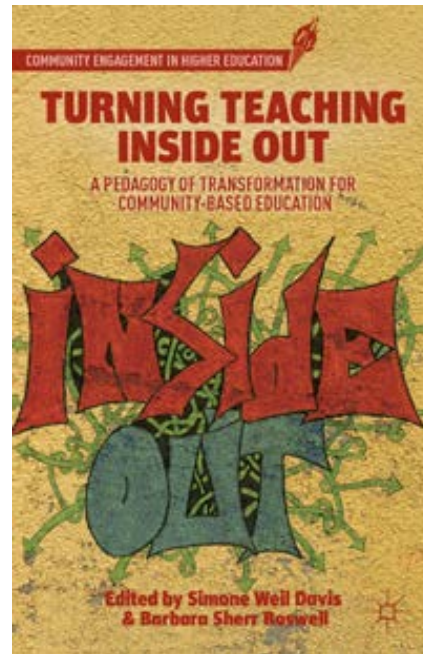
Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education

*Simone Weil Davis and
Barbara Sherr Roswell, Eds.*
Palgrave MacMillan, 2013. 321 pp.

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Covering the history, current state, and projected future of a pedagogical program is no small feat. However, in their edited anthology *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education*, Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell tackle the task of documenting the Inside-Out Program through an examination of both the theory and the practice of the Inside-Out program (2). Bringing together incarcerated students (“inside students”) and university students (“outside students”), the Inside-Out program enables a semester of experiential learning through a prison exchange program. The text is divided into seven parts encompassing a total of twenty-nine chapters. Each chapter typically consists of first-hand accounts from professors and students participating in Inside-Out’s disruption of traditional means of education, as well as providing practical applications and implications of Inside-Out exchanges. In their introduction, Davis and Roswell explain that the goal of this text is to consider the “broader lessons the Inside-Out program provides for community-based learning” (1). Davis, the coordinator for Inside-Out Canada, and Roswell, the founding director of the Goucher Prison Education Partnership, gathered the following chapters to argue that disrupting conventional methods of service learning results in a “constructive dialogue that inspires participants to generate new ideas . . . that can make communities more inclusive, just, and socially sustainable” (3). Davis and Roswell’s introduction rounds off with snapshots of the ensuing sections, including introductions of contributors and how their work weaves together to interrupt preconceived notions of what counts as a classroom and who counts as a student by taking readers inside prison walls.

Part I, titled “Origin Tales: Seeding and Building a Program,” contains three chapters narrating the creation and development of Inside-Out. Chapters two and four are authored by Lori Pompa, Founder and Director of The Inside-Out Center, and Paul Perry, a founding member of Graterford Think Tank and originator of In-



side-Out, both chapters discuss the origination of Inside-Out and their positionality in the program. Chapter three, contributed by Melissa Crabbe, Inside-Out's Associate Director, discusses the expansion of the Inside-Out program. A particularly compelling facet to the Inside-Out program is the founders' consistent effort to distinguish between community-based learning and service-learning from notions of "charity":

We are also not "helping" the participants who are incarcerated; it is not charity or service of any kind . . . it is more appropriately understood as a "community-based learning" opportunity, through which *everyone* is seen as having something vital to offer in the learning process. (Pompa 16)

This inclusive idea—that everyone in any setting can contribute to the learning process—is crucial for readers as they move into Part II: "Expanding Teaching and Learning." The unconventional classroom set up reveals the potential for empowerment for both students and instructors. Contributing writers of chapter five through chapter ten identify as either Inside-Out facilitators, inside students, or outside students. Each of the six essays focuses on perennial issues associated with standard education and incarceration and how Inside-Out helps to address and make more explicit these tensions. Two chapters in this section focus on how education can be isolating. Outside student Amelia Larson in her essay, "Liberation from University Education" reflects her concerns on how emotionally isolating education can be:

The university environment in fact reflects the kind of emotional poverty that modern society perpetuates. The mad drive to *achieve* and be *better* divides the whole individual into separate parts (intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual) and divides us from one another. (64)

Following the themes of educational and social issues, the essay "American Educational System," by inside student K. D. A. Daniel-Bey, focuses on his concern that conventionally administered education can "suck the joy out of learning and thereby out of life itself" (73). Both essays demonstrate how a lack of social relevance and lack of student-centered learning practices creates distance between students and education, and both pieces find solutions and inspirations from Inside-Out program as a way to move through walls of social isolation. Charles Boyd, an instructor of Inside-Out, explains that Inside-Out seeks to "removes the barriers that impede the possibility of relational atmosphere where everyone is equal" and allows real education, one where we can learn from every person in the room, to begin (81). The topics addressed in this section, and particularly dealt with in Larson's and Daniel-Bey's essays, reveal that disrupting traditional means of education by bringing together students and incarcerated persons allows for open discussion of social issues of isolation and inclusivity.

Part III: "Productive Intersectionality: Navigating Race, Place, Gender and Class" discusses the challenges of inclusivity, college/community collaboration, and how organizers confront manifestations of privilege. Part III opens with a write-up of a roundtable discussion held by the Inside-Out Think Tank. The roundtable addresses the topic of recognizing oppression in the classroom and how to train instructors to handle sensitive topics in their classrooms. Chapter twelve, "Being Human" by Erin

Howley, and thirteen, “Breaking Through ‘Isms’” by Ella Turenne, discuss the workshops that each educator developed to facilitate discussions between inside and outside students. Such pedagogical analysis lead to growth and liberation for those in the classroom, as reflected on in chapter fourteen, “Trusting the Process: Growing and Liberating Self-Reflective Capacities Behind the Prison Walls” by outside students Kayla Follett and Jessie Rodger. This section allows readers to observe the development of Inside-Out programming through Think Tank discussions, development of workshop and classroom exercises, and student reflections on these practices. All three of these subjects put together in Part One iterates Davis’ and Roswell’s explanation of community-based learning through constructing a dialogue that inspires participants to generate new ideas.

Part IV: “Transformation? Connection as Catalyst,” which contains five chapters of reflections from both instructors and students that predominately analyzes “social inequality and calls for political change” (164). In chapter eighteen, a piece titled “Inside-Out: The Reach and Limits of Prison Education Program,” Davis writes about how she seeks to understand not only how we define crime and enact punishment in North America, but also, how we define education and enact meaningful learning: “Whether critiqued as ‘cultural capital’ or lauded as ‘money in the bank,’ education is often described as something that one acquires and then possesses as an *individual*” (163–164). At the end of this chapter, Davis recounts a final paper written by one of her Inside-Out students that discusses generosity and the realization of how words make the best gifts. Davis reflects on this essay and the cultural value placed on education thus writing, “So, perhaps we can benefit from thinking of education as part of a gift economy, rather than a cultural capital” (172). This essay, along with this section’s selected pieces, argues for readers to envision new systems of education, not only for how education opens the door for persons to enter or move up in society, but also for how education helps them critically interrogate society’s predetermined avenues defining success (173). By stepping out of traditional classroom norms, such as how Inside-Out takes college students out of traditional classrooms, we can better understand community-based learning as a form of experiential relationship building.

Part V: “Yardsticks and Roadmaps: Evaluating Change” addresses the challenges organizers, instructors, and students face. This three-chapter section covers the “pressure to research and evaluate successful programs” and concerns about research in community-based settings such as prisons (Allred, et al. 199–200). Chapter twenty-three, “Evaluating the Impact of Community-based Learning: Participatory Action Research as a Model for Inside-Out” by Angela Bryant and Yasser Payne, lays out the limitations of Community-based Learning as well as providing a theoretical framework for how participatory action research (PAR) can assess the impact of Inside-Out. The methodological framework of PAR, as Bryant and Payne point out, works by organizing Inside-Out students to conduct an empirically-grounded group project designed by class participants (229). This model allows representatives from the group being studied (i.e., incarcerated persons) to be an active part of the research team which aids researchers to make connections to the group being studied and allows for experiential learning by working alongside members of these groups. Instead

of being separate parties, PAR helps researchers break down the walls that separate a community of people. This move to have inside students be active participants in the classroom alongside outside students and treated as contributing members in a learning environment recapitulates Pompa's distinction between community-based learning and notions of charity.

Finding ways to scale the metaphorical walls between groups, especially in different classroom settings, forces instructors to get creative; Part VI: "Leaning into the Future: Helping Change Endure," discusses the alterations instructors made to their classroom design and the challenges they faced to overcome internalized biases and to adapt to the Inside-Out program. Giovanna Shay's essay, "Inside-Out as Law School Pedagogy," describes the modifications she made to her class structure to teach a law curriculum. Through interactive discussion formats and structured group activities, Shay helped her students build trust. One aspect of her original class design that Shay kept consistent was the required weekly essay, which became vital in assessing her students' needs. Struggling to alter classroom design and adapt to the Inside-Out classroom is conveyed further in Matt Soares' following chapter "Teaching the Instructors," in which he reflects on training instructors to help their students engage in experiential learning. As an incarcerated facilitator who trains instructors who were "very accomplished and established people," Soares has a unique perspective on how to ignite scholarly sparks and dialogue.

Part VII: "Closing Circle," wraps up *Turning Teaching Inside-Out* through two reflections by inside students and closing remarks by Lori Pompa. The student reflections effectively convey the impact Inside-Out made on them through classroom discussions of social issues they encounter as inside and outside students. An essay by inside student, Nyki Kish titled "Preconceived Notions," explains how Inside-Out has liberated her in mind and heart through cultivating trust in a discussion-based environment. The prison's walls can no longer keep students isolated, and Pompa follows these reflections with an emphatic call-to-exchange: Inside-Out moves through walls—it is an exchange—between many people who live on both sides of a prison wall. It is through this exchange, realized through the crucible of dialogue, that the walls around us and within us begin to crumble" (276).

Overall, *Turning Teaching Inside-Out* is a valuable book for *Community Literacy Journal* readers, as this anthology gives readers a glimpse into a growing community-based learning program that allows both students and instructors to examine social issues through a "prism of prison" (3). Though most of the classes taught in the Inside-Out program focus on criminal justice, the methods this program uses to craft a pedagogy that scales walls of isolation can prove helpful in traditional classroom settings. The true gem of this narrative is the incorporation of essays written by inside students. The insights presented by the participating students will keep readers invested, while also offering actionable ideas for pedagogical revisions instructors can make in their own classrooms to facilitate mindful discussions on topics ranging from social justice to ethical engagement within our communities.