

In summary, the book gives a thorough and clear description of the different standards of evaluating police uses of force. I highly recommend it for that reason, as long as readers are aware of the lack of sociological analysis and there are clear that there is a difference between the law on the books and the law on the streets when it comes to police uses of force. This book can be useful not only to policing leadership and scholars but also to activists and organizers. Understanding the standards of evaluation can provide the framework and language for clear and direct calls for action to the appropriate and specific agency, individual, or department responsible for evaluating the use of force. While the ambiguity associated with police uses of force typically work in the favor of police organizations, this book provides the tools to clear the fog from the legal and administrative proceedings surrounding a use-of-force incident.

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Becky Thompson

Teaching with Tenderness: Toward an Embodied Practice. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017. 168 pp. \$95.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0-252-04116-7, \$24.95 (softcover). ISBN: 978-0-252-08270-2.

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A shrewd sociologist once beckoned that “education” was not the “panacea for all ills”; “it is not,” he admonished “an institution intended or adapted to settle social problems of every kind.” (Du Bois 1935:1). Because “no school” could “organize

industry...settle the matter of wage...found homes...establish justice or make a civilized world,” the nation’s inequalities, he held, could neither “be met” nor “settled” by mere curricular reforms and “*new methods of teaching*.” (Du Bois 1935:3–11). This pragmatic and seemingly cynical social scientist was none other than the esteemed Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois. Addressing a convention of African American educators at the height of the Great Depression, his caution reveals not the powerlessness of the classroom but rather, its paradox. For while “the school cannot attack social problems directly. It can and must attack them” with all the “indirect” means available at its disposal (Du Bois 1935:2). In her latest, *Teaching with Tenderness: Toward an Embodied Practice*, sociologist Dr. Becky Thompson queries the extent to which pedagogy might prove to be that neglected weapon.

Almost a century removed from the grips of the Great Depression, the nation finds itself ensnared in yet another global downturn, this time wrought on by the challenges accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic. Sociologists of education have been rigorously investigating the latent and manifest implications for education parity (Tyson 2020). Neither the predictions nor short-term findings are particularly optimistic (Dorn et al. 2020; Engzell, Frey, and Vehagen 2020). Anticipating these exacerbations, university officials have called to substitute traditional “rankings and metrics” with “narrative and reflection,” competition with “caution” and “compassion” (Greene 2020). A greater sense of urgency could not be marshaled for what Thompson is terming here a “pedagogy of tenderness” (p. 2).

For Thompson, *Teaching with Tenderness* is to deliver instruction in such a way as to convey compassion for the lived experiences of students. A pedagogy “that is part mindfulness, part playfulness, part intuition, part analysis; a pedagogy that works inside and outside of the classroom” (pp. 18–19). It denotes a capaciousness for emotion and pedagogic recognition of the roles trauma and social injustice play in mitigating and, at times, “overwhelming” the learning experience (Noddings 2005:151). Thompson links tenderness to the politics of dis/embodiment and decorporealization. An import from critical pedagogy, Thompson conscripts this concept to sanction tacit forms of “epistemic injustice” (Kotzee 2017:324–36) and “banking” pedagogies in the classroom (Freire 2017:44–46). In sociology courses, this generally translates into methods and pedagogical practices that see positivism and scientific objectivity lorded

over the subjectivities and subjugated modes of knowing students bring to their courses (Freire 2017:24). Thompson issues: “For the most part, it still feels like teachers carry...minds to one place...bodies to another...Students sense and feel these splits” (p. 17). For Thompson, university instruction is assumed to occur on an unlevelled playing field. She brandishes as evidence the holistic wellness students sacrifice and the barriers (often structural) they must surmount pursuant to satisfying routine academic obligations (pp. 47–56). As social inequalities “manifest themselves in the classroom,” pedagogies of tenderness seek equity from the very outset (p. 3). Thompson contends that issues of fairness tend to exceed the purview of university instructors. As a result, they are often bracketed until deemed valid or significantly impeding. Pedagogies of tenderness endeavor to level this learning field through acknowledging the embodied needs, traumas, and inequalities that can mitigate and overwhelm learning. Its premise can be summarized in Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1997:285) aphorism that “treating different things the same can generate as much inequality as treating the same things differently.”

Thompson’s text is segmented into a six-chapter structure prefaced by an introduction. Although attention is occasionally allocated to discrete strategies for the university classroom, greater attention is earmarked for conceptual outlining and rhetorical defense of the pedagogical program. Crucially, *Teaching with Tenderness* is neither a research study on applications of tenderness pedagogy, nor does it readily signal a location for itself in the context of sociology and education research literatures. This is partly due to subject matter as theoretical texts on university pedagogies are frequently overlooked in education research (e.g., Harney and Moten 2013). But it is also methodological in many senses. Thompson’s text maintains a highly autotheoretical disposition. Scholars and ongoing work in neighboring research areas are cited sparingly. These observations do not imply a lack of sociological character or relevancy, however. It is important to note that tenderness pedagogy originated in the sociology classroom (pp. 25–35). Crucially, the author sees sociology faculty as the most immediate benefactors, particularly those delivering instruction on social inequalities. For Thompson, decorporealization is understood to elicit particular hazards in this area (pp. 2, 44). In enlisting an autotheoretical approach, Thompson contributes to ongoing disputes in the field. She interrogates disciplinary boundaries

and methodological norms, challenging assumptions concerning the constitution of *real* sociological theory (Sanderson 2005:2).

By the way of an overview, *Teaching with Tenderness* begins with a topical introduction. This section sees Thompson introducing the reader to her “pedagogy of tenderness” and the linked concepts of dis/embodiment. Thompson indicts the university classroom for its sluggish disposition considering the exigency of the “inferred” and “expressed needs” of students (Noddings 2005:147; Thompson p. 2). Thompson states, “Googling ‘tenderness’ doesn’t exactly lead to a number of websites on teaching,” so “I began to reflect: when have I felt tenderness in the classroom?” (p. 2). She proceeds to reconstruct a genealogy of her pedagogical thought. She identifies feminist and critical pedagogies, mindfulness, and trauma studies as the principal contributors to the tenderness approach. She enumerates contributions offered from the respective lines of inquiry. From feminist and critical pedagogies, Thompson incorporates the fields’ multidisciplinary, learning-communities theory, embrace of play, classroom power analysis, and Freirean links to activism and social justice. From mindfulness, Thompson elicits embodiment, relationality, and modes of nonrational knowledge construction and acquisition. Lastly, Thompson locates in trauma studies a guide for grappling with interpersonal and structural care needs that manifest in the classroom.

Thompson makes use of chapter one (“Thatched Roof, No Walls”) to catalogue obstacles to tenderness teaching—both cultural and professional. Among them, the materialist and individualist foundations of Western culture are implicated (pp. 17–19). Closer to home, Thompson argues that professors are routinely underprepared, not to mention often uninterested, in demonstrating the level of involvement required by tenderness pedagogies (p. 21). Furthermore, the skills and knowledge bases it demands are typically proprietary and departmentalized, strewn across the academy’s division of labor (pp. 22–23). A substantive strategy is not offered in terms of overcoming these otherwise astute observations.

Chapter two (“Inviting Bodies”) sees Thompson tracing the pedagogical evolution of her tenderness approach. She locates its origins in the eccentric instructional methods of Dr. Maury Stein, professor of sociology at Brandeis University under whom Thompson served as a graduate teaching assistant. It is Dr. Stein who “gave me” the “template,” Thompson writes (p. 34). It is he who became

the “star” and “landing point” for Thompson’s pedagogy (p. 29). According to Thompson, Dr. Stein’s idiosyncratic teaching methods were able to foster “an intimacy and intensity in the class” through an emphasis on compassion (p. 28). Stein’s pedagogy involved mindfulness practices, literary and poetic reading assignments, guest speaker invitations to blue-collar and service workers, and in-class child care. Although noble, some of these practices have been criticized as being professionally inaccessible for marginalized academics (hooks 1994:191–200; Thompson 2017:35, 44–45, 81). Thompson weighs such concerns in light of observed student benefits.

In chapter three (“Creating Rituals”), Thompson brings frontal criticism to bear on what, in critical pedagogy, is termed “metaphysical” or “Cartesian dualism,” or the mind/body split (hooks 1994:193). This chapter contains the most streamlined discussion on teaching methods, according to the author, capable of fostering tenderness and overcoming decorporealization. According to Thompson, “Inviting the body into the classroom is... the realm we need to be willing to communicate when we teach, particularly about subjects that are considered taboo, sensitive, or too touchy” (p. 40). Thompson cites a naming exercise as one of such practices. Borrowed from Dr. Stein, this practice involves classroom storytelling where students sketch the biographical and etymological origins of their names. Thompson explains, “After the last student... successfully names everyone... I talk a bit about why we will start with the naming of the names every week” (p. 42). Closing circles are another practice. Thompson shares, “I end almost all classes with a five-to seven-minute talking circle where we stand or sit, holding hands as I ask” students “to share concerns, emotions, insights” (p. 48).

In grappling with the paradox of hardship and possibility wrought by trauma-informed pedagogies, chapters four through six are read coextensively (“Why We Flee,” “To You, I Belong,” “Our Bodies in the World”). Chapter four surveys the challenges colleagues and students express toward pedagogical trauma recognition. Past and current victimization (p. 69), professional sanction (p. 81), and gender and gendered racism are some of the factors considered (López 2003:7; Thompson p. 73). Qua “historical memory,” Thompson intimates a program professors might employ to connect student traumas to structural sociological factors in chapter five (p. 85). In doing so, she signals an opportunity for invigorated dialogue and research concerning

embodied and trauma-informed approaches to teaching the sociological imagination. Chapter six concludes reminding instructors “how we invite emotion and our bodies into the classroom matters” (p. 105). In the final analysis, it queries educators: “what if our work as teachers is to find our own tenderness and then help create sacred spaces so students can feel tenderness, too?” (p. 112).

Numbering 112 pages when excluding references, notes, and indices, Thompson’s *Teaching with Tenderness* can be best read as a discursive intervention. It represents an effort to initiate dialogue concerning embodied instruction, trauma-informed teaching, and mindfulness’s role within the college classroom and similar sites of adult education. Thompson’s work lacks a clear instructional home under sociology’s current organization. She laments that “empathy and listening” do not correspond with any direct coursework traditionally offered through graduate or undergraduate sociology programs (p. 33). Nonetheless, this text is certainly of interest in disciplinary locations where academic inequalities and pedagogical studies are considered. Thompson would make a fine addition to units on trauma-induced educational disparities. Prior to fulfilling instructional assistantships, graduate schools often require proctoring and/or single semesters of pedagogy coursework. Alongside standard teacher training programs, I imagine *Tenderness* could also integrate into these courses with ease. Additionally, empirical studies, longitudinal and ethnographic, as well as policy and comparative pedagogical analysis could further contribute to the instructional standing of the approach. Provided the author’s autotheoretical methodology, interested researchers might also look into contextualizing Thompson’s monograph with considerations to neighboring research literatures. At minimum, an engagement with Nel Noddings and the field of education care ethics is warranted. Thompson’s provocation wields immense potential.

Not only has the COVID-19 pandemic wrought on widespread calls for care and compassion throughout the academy, but sociologists have recently identified these values as desirable attributes for the discipline and its undergraduate majors (Rockwell et al. 2019). Studies also indicate that among its majors of color, sociology holds a perception of salience to civil rights struggles and “political and social movements” (Carnevale et al. 2016; Downs 2016). This suggests at a sizeable share of students entering the discipline seeking the sociological traditions that “liberate the imagination” and “aid social groups in overthrowing”

inequalities (Agger 1998:15), the kinds of sociological work symbolized in Du Bois or the Frankfurt School for example. Echoing what education researchers have argued elsewhere, Thompson's insistence on tenderness is a crucial pedagogical reminder that care needs must precede justice (Noddings 2005:147).

A pioneering philosopher of education once proclaimed that "educating... is not the same as teaching" (Patty 1938:49). "Learning," he added "takes place only in the activity of a self" (Patty 1938:50). I conclude with this reminder, anticipating the urge to preclude Thompson's tenderness pedagogy on the grounds that students are currently learning *just fine*. As Patty indicates, students *will* and *can be* educated under immense externalities. Incarceration, immigrant detention, and even pandemic-induced global shutdowns are but some examples. The question is not *whether* students will learn without tenderness, but rather, is it necessary, much less desirable, that they do so?

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James M. Lang.

Distracted: Why Students Can't Focus and What You Can Do about It. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020. 304 pp. \$30.00. ISBN-13: 9781541699809

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James M. Lang's latest book, *Distracted: Why Students Can't Focus and What You Can Do about It*, is a self-professed "hopeful book" (p.14) about how to engage students in the classroom despite the great human capacity for distraction and the ubiquitous digital devices that seem to increase that capacity. The book responds to a general question of how instructors can keep students engaged in a world of digital distractions. Lang answers with tactics to inspire attention and help students achieve the focus needed for learning. *Distracted* is intended for instructors who teach in-person college courses or advanced high school courses.