

Book Review: Teachin' It!: Breakout moves that break down barriers for Community College Students

Review By Michelle A. Payton

By Felicia Darling
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Teachin' It!: Breakout moves that break down barriers for community college students presents an easy read written for educators “to help... first generation college students [navigate] the unfamiliar terrain of college... [and] to bolster the success of students of color, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and other students [low income, food insecure, home insecure, formerly incarcerated, incarcerated, in recovery, foster care, bi-lingual]... who feel like cultural outsiders on community college campuses” (p. 1). Author Felicia Darling’s primary target audience for this text is community college instructors willing and able to combine teaching content and creating engagement for students with multiple needs. This text is packed full of ideas to help education practitioners experiment, make mistakes, and evolve as facilitators. The author quantifies that there are 50 new strategies that can be used immediately in the classroom. These strategies are backed up with research that reveals how soft skills—like empathizing and collaborating—improve persistence, completion, and transfer success of underserved, underprepared, underrepresented students.

Community college instructors—refined instructors with some years of experience, or budding experts just beginning—will find many ideas on how to be powerful professionals by facilitating versus offering a 100% lecture format in the classroom. Although instructors must know their content, they must also take a relational approach from this author’s perspective. Instructors are coaches, facilitators, mentors, and some even consider themselves colleagues to students who have little to no guidance in the academic world. Instructors are encouraged to be in a constant cycle of improvement, to take some risks, and to adopt methods of measurement that reflect a clear understanding of success. Many ideas are research-based, or have research measurement suggestions, and may give instructors the courage to integrate some theories into practice with more confidence.

To boost best practices in the classroom, instructors are also given a clear understanding of the population served in the community college environment. The author shares that 70% of community college students aren’t college-ready and need developmental coursework, but there are a number of reasons for this. For example, community college students are complex

and usually share more than one underrepresented identity which adds to their disadvantage and potential discrimination. In addition to being a first-generation student, student of color, LGBTQ+, learning disabled, incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, in recovery, bilingual, in foster care, and other minority identities, national numbers show that a large percentage are food insecure, are house insecure, have little to no parental or familial guidance, and are even discouraged to succeed. The author argues that these students already demonstrate grit by making it to class every day; what the students really need is understanding, support, and critical engagement. Many student stories are shared to develop a deeper understanding of their multilayered needs and to help minimize marginalization and biases in the classroom.

Throughout the text, solutions are outlined on successful executions in community college classrooms to optimize student success. For instance, there are simple suggestions like shaking students’ hands and a one-page document outlining classroom professional academic behavior on the first day. Additionally, there are many growth mindset activities suggested using videos (showing people that look like the diverse classroom), group assignments, independent work ideas, examples of effective facilitator verbiage, and techniques for instructors to share their own growth mindset stories to connect with students and serve as brainstorming tools. The author argues that students should be acknowledged as teachers and be encouraged to co-construct knowledge with peers for deeper learning; however, some may be concerned that this waters down curriculum content. To address this concern, strategies to co-construct knowledge range from easy to advanced executions to allow instructors to scaffold comfortably. In addition to techniques in the book, Feliciadarling.com is referenced a number of times, so instructors can dive deeper into solutions like the ABC Brainstorm, 3-minute Quick Write, Anticipating Guide, Cloud Brainstorm, Think-Write-Pair-Share, and more to accelerate student success.

Recognizing potential of students from all backgrounds reframes professionals from instructors to education practitioners, but this isn’t for the faint of heart. The author of *Teachin' It!: Breakout Moves that Break Down Barriers for Community College Students* makes the important point that instructors who layer in relational college skills while teaching content are doing twice the work. As a result, there have been times when the author focused solely on full-time faculty implementations, including measurement suggestions that hinged on having office hours and paid time outside of the actual classroom. However, adjuncts should know that there are 50 new strategies mentioned in this book, many are research-based to save time, and some are easily executed. That being said, whether full- or part-time faculty, the likelihood is high that the target reader of this book takes pride in building a community of practitioners who reach out to students who feel like outsiders. The unfortunate reality is statistics continue to show that persistence, completion, and transfer success are less likely for underserved, underprepared, and underrepresented students. Therefore, for many professionals, helping these students feel like they belong and are cared about is bigger than a community college paycheck.

