

Book Review

**Socially just pedagogies:
Posthumanist, feminist and materialist
perspectives in higher education**

Vivienne Bozalek, Rosi Braidotti, Tamara Shefer and Michalinos
Zembylas (eds.)
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018
231 pp

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I stumbled upon this book when I was in the early stages of my PhD and embarking on a journey to engage with posthumanist and new materialist theories that would speak to my social justice research context. The book was able to open up new possibilities and provocations and provide insights into ways of thinking about and enacting socially just pedagogies.

The edited collection, foregrounded by several chapters from the Global South context, brings together ideas that consider how social

justice from a critical posthumanist, new feminist materialist and affective turn can be put to work in higher education institutions and pedagogies. Bozalek, Braidotti, Shefer and Zembylas's motivation for this edition arose as a response to neoliberal development and the current global context of "inequality and injustice in higher education... there is an impetus for finding imaginative ways of engaging with the current dissatisfaction" (p.1). The chapters generate fresh empirical and theoretical tools that "envision and enact socially just pedagogies in various context" (p.9).

The chapters are divided into three parts: (1) Theoretical Perspectives; (2) Ethics and Response-ability in Pedagogical Practices; and (3) Locating Social Justice Pedagogies in Diverse Contexts. A range of theorists and empirical and theoretical tools are used to open up new possibilities, responsibilities and potential challenges, dangers and new questions, including, but not limited to, Deleuze and Guattari, Barad, Braidotti and Haraway's work, feminist (new) materialist/ critical posthuman(ist), diffractive methodologies, vibrant materialisms, ethico-onto-epistemologies, relational ontology, and embodied activism.

The three parts offer the symbiosis of inter-connections between theory-ethics-praxis. A "transversal composition of multiple assemblages of active minoritarian subjects" (p.xxii) who collaborate within a posthuman knowledge production in the process of becoming. This process of becoming in the chapters affords an alternative collective assemblage, that is made up of subjects that are "embedded and embodied, relational and affective" (p.xvii), a relational community, defined as a nomadic, transversal assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Braidotti, 1994).

Ideas from the affective turn, posthumanism, and new feminist materialism can have similar perspectives, which can make learning about them seem like moving through a maze; when you think you know the way forward...there is another t-intersection. However, I was drawn to each narrative, as a way of showing me how the contributors navigated the maze. More importantly, each narrative showed me that these ideas and their performativity in their socially just pedagogies, is a way of reaching towards history to address social injustices and reaching forward into the future "calling forth 'a people to come'" (p.24).

Two chapters particularly resonated for my PhD, significantly on research methodologies in theory and in practice: Vivienne Bozalek and

Michalinos Zembylas's Chapter 3 'Practicing Reflection or Diffraction? Implications for Research Methodologies in Education'; and Chapter 12 'Thebuwa and a Pedagogy of Social Justice: Diffracting Multimodality Through Posthumanism' by Denise Newfield.

Bozalek and Zembylas's (2018) provide an alternative methodology in education from reflexivity, suggesting instead Haraway's (1997) and Barad's (2007) diffraction predicated on a relational ontology. They point out that reflexivity is reductionist and grounded in representation, mirroring and reflecting sameness, while diffraction, is attuned to differences and how they matter in knowledge-making practices. Their analysis focuses on how reflection and diffraction differ from each other and/or intersect.

Using Brad, Haraway and illustrations from educational scholars, Bozalek and Zembylas propose a diffractive methodology as a break from reflectivity. Notably, they discuss how diffraction is a way of "troubling dualisms: me and not me, discourse and matter, words and things" and "while reflection can document difference, diffraction, on the other hand, is a process of producing difference" (pp.53-54).

Bozalek and Zembylas discuss both the meaning of and the practice of reflexivity and diffraction in research methodologies. This resonates with my research, as I come to see/read/think about the criticisms of reflexivity and alternative methods and practice that are attentive to "how differences get made and what the effects of these differences are" (p.47) and the inclusivity of non-humans. This material-discursive entanglement, as Bozalek and Zembylas eloquently write using Barad and Haraway, is both head and heart scholarly engagement, a response-ability, a yearning for social justice and seeing oneself as part of the world...towards possible worlds.

While Bozalek and Zembylas do focus on the particularly useful aspects of diffractive analysis, they are conscious of creating binaries between reflection and diffraction, acknowledging the contributions made, specifically on critical reflection. This is important for researchers like me, who come to their PhD with a heavy reliance on critical reflection through their previous studies, and a new entanglement with diffraction through posthumanist and new materialist theories.

An interesting and practical aspect of Bozalek and Zembylas's work is their attention to articulating the break made in diffractive analysis from interpretative reading of data. Interpretivism is often used in educational research methodology, and they make a strong case for a diffractive analysis as an "ethical and socially just practice" that:

produces new entangled ways of theorising and performing research practices, co-constituting new possibilities of strengthening and challenging knowledges...(which) explore the ethico-onto-epistemological potentiality of diffraction (p.57)

Newfield (2018), a white, female university lecturer, returns to data from South Africa assembled during a multimodal social semiotics analysis of a case study research undertaken in 2002, referred to as the Thebuwa case study. 'Thebuwa' (which means 'To Speak') (p.210) employed a multimodal approach to the teaching of poetry in pursuit of social justice. Newfield along with Robert Maungedzo, a young black, male teacher, worked with English Additional Language (EAL) Grade 10 students, from Soweto, to transform the classroom from lethargy to creativity. The students participated in different modes of poetry (print to oral to visual to multimodal) and Newfield analysed these passages from one mode to the next. As a participant-researcher Newfield drew on African cultural studies to explore the choices made by the participants using local semiotics and the learning that occurred. She found that each mode communicated aspects of the participants' multi-layered identity and that the learners were "agentive meaning-makers who engaged in semiosis through reshaping resources" (p.212).

In her return to and re-investigation of the data, Newfield diffracts the previous multimodal social semiotics analysis through posthumanism. Using Barad (2007) and Haraway's (1997) diffractive approach to read and re-read the entangled phenomenon of issues, principles and practices that pertain to socially just pedagogies from a particular moment in history as well as the present time, in the hope of transforming higher education. Newfield acknowledges that multimodal social semiotics and posthumanism may not be "amiable to being diffracted" (p. 212). The former theory is human-centered and the latter philosophy is anti-anthropocentric. However, for Newfield, this opportunity is "provocative and welcome" with possibilities for new understandings of the data relating to present socially just pedagogies (p.212).

Newfield is under no illusion of the difficulty in investigating the entangled, dynamic, and complex Thebuwa assemblage, as more than text. However, she uses the concept of intra-active entanglement between time, place, matter, teacher, students, researcher, journeys, histories, circumstances, semiotic modes, affect and aspirations to re-form or transform. She beautifully articulates this as “marks of the intra-actions are made on their bodies” (p.218). Further, that a posthuman diffractive approach shows the Thebuwa students as an “agentive, intra-active process of becoming...a becoming-other” (p.219), a transformative becoming (Braidotti, 2011) of ‘potentia’ (Braidotti, 2013) of life’s force becoming.

All of the chapters in this book convey rich narratives of socially just pedagogies, both discursive and material. The personal narratives explore the participants and researchers becoming-other as agents of meaning and culture, through their lived experiences and knowledge, as embodied encounters within intra-actions.

Rosi Braidotti’s foreword is a succinctly articulated argument for socially just pedagogies in posthuman times. She describes two basic requirements, first, the need for a posthuman ontology and a new ethics, second, the socio-political dimension of social justice. She describes these features of the posthuman scholarship in the edited collection as “materially embodied and embedded in a radical and non-reductive form of vital empiricism”, “building on the post-Foucauldian vision of power as multi-layered (potestas and potentia)” and multidirectional (the actual and virtual), de-familiarisation and dis-identification, and collaborative.

Rosi Braidotti asks the question; can philosophy and the Humanities rise to the post-anthropocentric shift:

The answer can only be ethical...the awareness of ‘our’ being in this together; that is to say: environmentally-based, embodied, and embedded and in symbiosis with each other...It is an act of unfolding of the self onto the world and the enfolding within the world...an adequate measure of what we are actually in the process of becoming. The rest is life’s work (p.xxiv).

I believe this book is an excellent resource for those just entering the journey of posthumanism, new materialism and the affective turn, together with those already embodied and embedded in these ideas. It is not limited to the higher education context, as it engages the reader with

important questions regarding socially just pedagogies: how would a socially just pedagogy work in theory and practice; what can be explored through the theoretical approaches; what are the potentialities for re-imagining research methodologies, practices and new ways of being and doing afforded; and how are the theoretical perspectives weaved through ethic-onto-epistemological and affective configurations?