



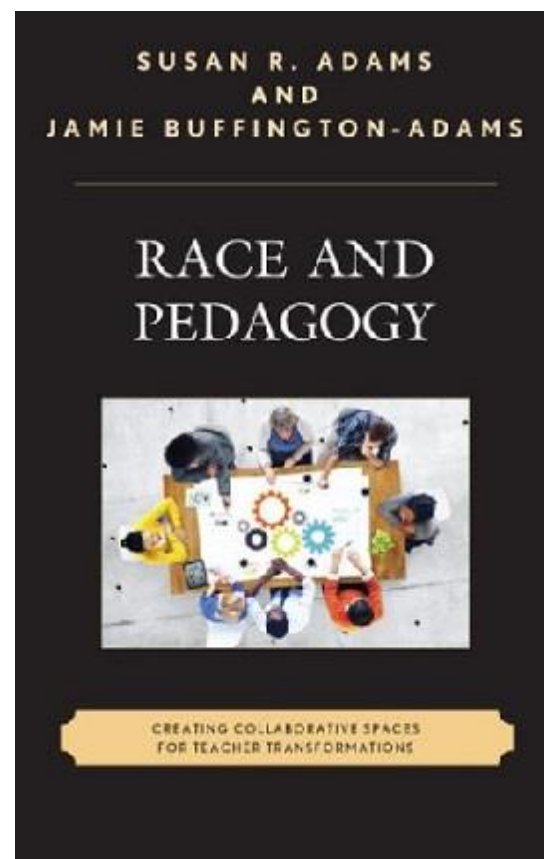
Adams, S., & Buffington-Adams, J. (2016). *Race and pedagogy: Creating collaborative spaces for teacher transformations*. London: Lexington Books.

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**Reviewed by Frederic Fovet
University of Prince Edward Island
Canada**

The first clarification to make regarding this volume is that the title may be a little over-ambitious. It may thus inadvertently attract a reader seeking a comprehensive and thick manual on critical pedagogy and race. This is not what this book offers, and its scope is much narrower than the title might suggest. It is in fact a PhD thesis—Susan Adams’ doctoral work—that has been adapted for publication as a book, and as such it offers insight into a very specific research project, with narrowly defined objectives, which must be evaluated in context. Jamie Buffington-Adams is described as one of Susan’s friends and colleagues, and as a co-participant in the workshops on race and pedagogy that formed the basis for Susan’s data collection. They are described as having discovered, upon meeting each other, that their lives intersected in many ways, on both personal and professional levels: “We share with you here a story of convergence in which lines of flight and teacher lives powerfully intersected and connected” (p. 1)



The study itself is a rich qualitative project that combines ethnography and action research. The project began with a professional development workshop for teachers on race and pedagogy, which was meant to form the basis for Susan's data collection, but quickly and organically metamorphosed into a much wider process instead. Originally 10 educators took part, in 2010, in a professional development workshop entitled the Teaching for Educational Equity (TFEE) Seminar. An event lasting a week, the seminar had the aim of providing a space "for participants to critically reflect upon what it means to engage in race-based equity work in her/his local context in a thoughtful and provocative manner" (p. 14). The training and background of the facilitators themselves is described at length in the book as an example of the work of a community of practice, defining itself as a "critical friendship group". The reader will notice that the notion of "professional friendship" keeps reappearing through this book, and weaves an innovative and cohesive thematic fabric. Though the description and analysis of this critical friendship group is not central to the main concern of the book itself, this nonetheless represents a fascinating segment and a rich reflection on innovative formats for professional development in the arena of social justice.

This is not where the initiative or the doctoral data collection ended, however, and it is the detailed, genuinely ethnographic description of the story that followed that is this book's greatest asset. At the end of the TFEE seminar one of the facilitators suggested that five of the workshop participants should continue their work and reflection beyond their week together, a process that appeared relatively easy and logical since they all lived in close proximity to each other. These, at first informal, follow up meetings became more systematic and structured. Soon the participants reflected on their needs, their personalities, their professional challenges, and

the format itself of these meetings and created an "Equity Group". First and foremost this ongoing workshop format addressed an important need, identified by the participants, for a congenial and safe space for collegiate support: "In this group, trust was the foundations from which we built strong professional and personal relationships" (p. 29). The story telling is richly evocative here and, as a piece of writing, perfectly blends the self-reflection encouraged by critical pedagogy, and the collaborative meaning making sought out by action research.

The actual processes of "meaning making" used by the Equity Group are described in detail in the book and include Collaborative Affinity Mapping Analytic (CAMA), as well as *currere*. The first is an innovative process of discourse analysis that seeks to sufficiently free the participants that they might share their vulnerability as critical pedagogues within institutions that perpetuate racial prejudice. *Currere*, on the other hand, is a more traditional methodology in curriculum studies, an autobiographical reflection on educational experiences that then shapes one's view of the curriculum and society more generally. Both methodological processes are described in detail here but it might be fair to say that they do not, in truth, represent the most interesting section of the text. This is where the methodology chapter of Susan Adam's dissertation is summarized, and though the authors try to keep this section lively and hands on—photos of the data collection process are even included—it does not speak to the reader as successfully as the other chapters. The main take away for the reader throughout the book is the effective creation of a safe space for professional reflection on race, and it seems doubtful that the rather mechanical and rigid methodological processes described here genuinely contributed to this. Instead these served an obvious purpose in the doctoral work being showcased, an objective somewhat different from the trust and friendship

building process also described in the volume. Instead, the simple system of probing questions, described early on as part of the emergence of the Equity Group, seems to have been most effective in getting conversations to flow. Most importantly, the reader will undoubtedly feel that some of the richness and depth of the professional friendships described here seem to have in fact been fortuitous to a degree—the mere accidental coming together of likeminded and well matched personalities—and hence difficult to analyze in terms of systematic ‘recipe’ or transferability to other contexts.

It is impossible to review a book tackling critical pedagogy without reverting back to some of Freire’s essential formulations and his original premise. While this book addresses many of the central concerns of critical pedagogy squarely—in terms of the continuing relevance of race in the classroom, the oppression still occurring in schools, and teachers’ inherent privilege and bias—there is one angle of Freirean theory that is mostly ignored: transformative action. Critical pedagogy is often criticized as a theoretical discourse, which can at times get lost in its own ‘ivory tower’ and remain conceptual to the point of having little political relevance. Freire, and many after him, have stressed the importance of transformative action as the corner stone of critical pedagogy; this must be kept firmly in mind for this discourse to remain politically relevant. So how does this

book fare in terms of remaining firmly anchored in transformative practice? Not terribly well is sadly the answer, and this despite having a concluding chapter which begins with the heading ‘Getting Real’. In truth, there are few lessons drawn here as to how to tackle persisting racism in schools or how to unpack and erode some of the systemic power dynamics that are perpetuated in educational institutions. A warning had been offered early on: ‘In this book, we offer no quick fixes, no cookie cutter solutions, and no silver bullets guaranteed to change beliefs, practices or outcomes’ (p. 8) But then why, a Freirean might wonder, label this a volume on critical pedagogy?

While it fails to deliver in this respect, it remains a text of great interest, but perhaps not in relation to the goals it sets itself. If this book makes a significant contribution to the field, it is not really in terms of enriching the collective discourse on critical pedagogy. Instead, it offers one of the rare published examples of a genuine, democratic and thorough participatory action research process among teachers, a feat which should not be dismissed too hastily. It indeed offers an evocative and fascinating story telling on how to create and maintain a space where teachers achieve genuine long-term self-reflection and true earnest dialogue with colleagues, objectives that are often discussed in action research projects but rarely achieved.

About the Reviewer

Frederic Fovet is an Assistant Professor in Education at the University of Prince Edward Island where he regularly teaches MEd courses on Critical Pedagogy and Theory. His main area of research is students with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Frederic has also been Director of the Office for Students with Disabilities at McGill over the period of his doctorate and he has a keen focus on Disability Studies and more specifically Universal Design for Learning.




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