

Education Review

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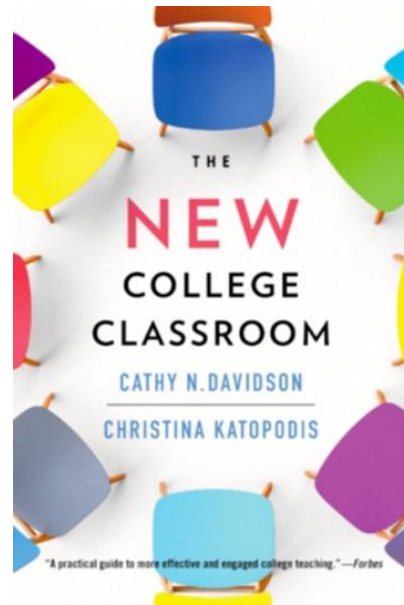
Davidson, C. N., & Katopodis, C. (2022). *The new college classroom*. Harvard University Press.

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The New College Classroom by Cathy N. Davidson and Christina Katopodis was published in 2022 at a pivotal moment in higher education. Just two years prior, Jonathan Zimmerman (2020) observed that “the modern professor [is] exceedingly learned but rarely succeeds in awakening the personal affection which marks the work of a great teacher” (p. 32). In *The Amateur Hour*, Zimmerman outlines various pitfalls in higher education. *The New College Classroom* addresses many of these pitfalls. In the brief introduction, Davidson and Katopodis highlight how lectures are the traditional teaching method used by most college professors: 89% of class time is spent with the professor speaking *at* the students. The authors present concrete, research-based strategies that they hope will create an environment more conducive to learning.



The New College Classroom is divided into two main sections. The first section, titled Changing Ourselves, consists of three chapters. The first chapter provides a brief history of higher education. Davidson and Katopodis discuss how the “attitudes, structures, and expectations” within higher education were designed to prepare students for a world that is drastically different from our world today (p. 21). They discuss how there is no better time to “unlearn a system originally designed for standardization” and “for ranking and rating the elite few” (p. 25). Davidson and Katopodis explain that the mission of their book is to inspire teachers “to identify and resist the imbalances and inequities” in their classrooms, thereby promoting pedagogical practices that value diversity (p. 26). The second chapter is dedicated to active learning, which allows students to engage with course material in a different way. Here, the authors identify four key principles that are foundational to active learning: (1) scaffolding, (2) growth mindset, (3)

the flipped classroom, and (4) backwards planning. Davidson and Katopodis discuss how these four key principles can be utilized to explain to students, parents, and administrators the value of active learning. In the final chapter of this section, the authors stress how teaching should be viewed as mentoring, which helps create an equitable learning community for all.

The second section of *The New College Classroom* constitutes two-thirds of the book. This section is entitled Changing Our Classrooms and provides professors with concrete pedagogical practices that they can implement to improve the learning experiences of their students. The fourth chapter provides guidance on what professors should do before the very first class. Davidson and Katopodis emphasize the importance of designing a course that lends itself to active learning. One recommendation they give throughout this chapter is to co-create the syllabus with the students. This allows the students to identify what topics would be the most meaningful for them to learn throughout the course. Numerous other recommendations are provided.

In Chapter 5, the authors provide college faculty with a few ideas on how to organize their first day of class. They discuss how it is imperative for students to be actively engaged with the syllabus. Some ways that professors can do this is by 1) designing a short scavenger hunt, 2) asking the students to create a visual representation of the syllabus, 3) implementing collaborative annotation, or 4) utilizing the *Interactive Syllabus Project*, which was created by Professor Guy McHendry of Creighton University. The remainder of the chapter is a discussion of other activities that professors could implement on the first day of class. Davidson and Katopodis recommend incorporating critical reflection by asking students to share how they learn best as well as designing a class constitution that lists the values, rules, and responsibilities of all class members.

Davidson and Katopodis then transition to pedagogical practices that professors can implement at any point in the semester. All of the strategies mentioned in Chapter 6 utilize participatory learning. The first strategy mentioned is *Think, Pair, Share*. This strategy asks students to think about an open-ended question for 90 seconds, pair up with a partner for another 90 seconds to verbalize their initial thoughts, and then have each pair share their thoughts with the entire class. Another strategy mentioned is *Entry and Exit Tickets*. The authors discuss how entry tickets allow professors to take the temperature of the room prior to the start of class, while exit tickets allow them to understand what content from the course is still lingering in the student's brain. Some other strategies mentioned are *Everybody Raise Your Hand*, *Fishbowl*, *Raising the Stakes*, *Listening Dyad*, and *Collaborative Note-Taking*. Each of these strategies is defined and descriptions on how to implement them in the classroom are provided.

Highlighted in Chapter 7 is how democratic and antiracist pedagogy are necessary when implementing participatory learning. The authors write “in a short class period, time is too precious for any one person or group to dominate the discussion” (p. 126). They recommend utilizing popsicle sticks or question stacking to ensure that all voices are heard. In addition, Davidson and Katopodis provide professors with advice on how to handle any intentional or unintentional

offensive remarks that may be made. They describe the Oops/Ouch Method and Inside/Outside Circles which both can be used to repair relationships that might arise from hurtful comments.

Next, the authors provide concrete strategies for implementing group work into the classroom. Group work is another participatory learning pedagogical practice that enables active learning to take place. This practice can be immensely effective if the professor sets expectations from the very beginning, emphasizes how constructive feedback will be a necessary component, and identifies how power imbalances or gender dynamics can affect group work. After that, it will be important for each group to create “job descriptions” for their roles in the group. This ensures that everyone is not only an active member but also understands what they are responsible for. Davidson and Katopodis even discuss how to conduct group work in predominantly online courses.

In Chapter 9, guidance on how to implement research projects into college courses is offered. These types of project are most effective when (1) students are engaged with the research and asked to think critically about the content, (2) student’s motivation and curiosity is sustained, and (3) the project is broken into smaller, more manageable tasks. Davidson and Katopodis suggest how these research projects might best satisfy these three key principles. Their first recommendation is to design a research project where students are asked to grapple with real-world issues. This has been proven to increase their understanding of the academic content. A few additional recommendations they provide are to help students create a feasible schedule for their research project, conduct periodic check-ins with each student, and have students share the results of their research publicly.

In Chapter 10, Davidson and Katopodis discuss how important feedback is to participatory learning, because it highlights how learning is a continual process with the end goal to be a deep understanding of a specific piece of academic knowledge. The authors explain how professors give feedback that counts, how students give feedback to each other, how to ensure that students are actually reading the feedback, and asking students to provide you, the professor, with feedback. The authors note feedback should be given as soon as possible after the students submit their assignments. This feedback should “provide them with constructive suggestions for how they might improve” and be framed in a way that depicts this as an opportunity to grow (p. 198). One way to ensure students are reading feedback is by asking them to submit revisions. They can explain on a cover sheet what changes they made and how those changes connect to the feedback they were given. They note, encourage the students to provide you, the professor, with feedback: Ask them, “What could I do to make this course even better?” The authors also recommend identifying changes that can be made immediately upon receiving student feedback. This models that everyone has opportunities to use feedback to grow.

Chapter 11 is addressed to the hot button topic of grades. Davidson and Katopodis state that “grades raise student anxiety and decrease motivation, detract from actual learning, and reduce the different ways a student learns [or] absorbs materials to one letter, score, or number” (p. 223). The authors delve

into the history of grading, the drawbacks of grading, and potential pressures to grade from universities. They offer suggestions on how to move your college course away from traditional grading. A recommendation that stood out is contract grading. This contract depicts all of the different requirements of the course and explains the grade a student could earn by completing some, most, or all of the work. The student can then determine ahead of time what grade they aspire to achieve by the end of the semester.

The New College Classroom ends with “What Could Possibly Go Wrong” where Davidson and Katopodis acknowledge how participatory learning is vastly different from the traditional lecture model. They recognize that university guidelines may prevent educators from truly creating a *new college classroom* and that implementing a change of this magnitude can feel overwhelming. This is why the authors encourage educators to get it right 85% of the time. Flops are going to happen. In fact, they address a few of their own failures. The transition to participatory learning is not an easy one, but worthwhile.

Dedicated to active learning, this book is designed for professors seeking to create a new version of the college classroom. The authors provide a wealth of strategies on how to design their course and what activities to implement on the first day of class, as well as how to incorporate participatory learning strategies, create effective group work and/or research projects, utilize feedback more purposefully, and rethink the role of grades. This volume also serves as a comprehensive guide for doctoral students entering the field of education. Although the authors intend to embolden professors to create student-centered classrooms, the volume of strategies they present may lead to paralysis rather than action. For a more accessible second edition, the authors might consider restructuring the content and including more visual examples. Despite these critiques, the book remains a valuable resource for professional development in higher education.

Reference

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About the Reviewer

Brianne McGee is a doctoral student in the Department of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education at the University of Tennessee, where her studies are focused on elementary education. She previously earned an MEd in curriculum and instruction with a concentration in special education at the University of Virginia, and an MEd in language and literacy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Before pursuing her doctorate, she spent 10 years teaching elementary grades in Texas, South Carolina, and Nebraska. Her research centers on preparation of pre-service teachers to manage the wide range of behaviors present in inclusive classrooms.



About the Book Authors

Cathy N. Davidson is Distinguished Professor of English and in the MA in Digital Humanities and MS in Data Analysis and Visualization at the Graduate Center, CUNY. She is Founding Director of the Futures Initiative, a program dedicated to advancing equity and innovation in higher education. She is the R. F. DeVarney Professor Emerita of Interdisciplinary Studies at Duke University where she served as Duke's (and the nation's) first Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies. Davidson has published some 20 books. Her book, *The New Education: How to Revolutionize Higher Education to Prepare Students for a World in Flux* (Basic Books), is recipient of the 2019 Frederick W. Ness Annual Book Prize awarded by the Association of American Colleges and Universities.



Christina Katopodis, PhD, is the Managing Director of the Academic Center for Excellence in Research and Teaching (ACERT) at Hunter College, CUNY. She is the former Associate Director of Transformative Learning in the Humanities and founder of Engaged & Ready, a project that empowers faculty with antiracist active learning tools to democratize their classrooms. She is the winner of the 2019 Diana Colbert Innovative Teaching Prize and the 2018 Dewey Digital Teaching Award.



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