

Education Review

Reseñas Educativas



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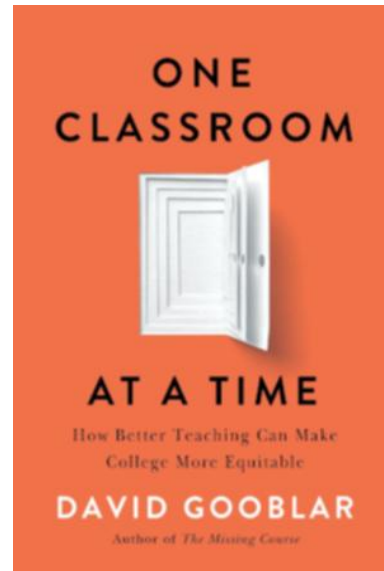
Gooblar, D. (2025). *One classroom at a time: How better teaching can make college more equitable*. Harvard University Press.

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David Gooblar's *One Classroom at a Time* contributes to contemporary debates about equity, teaching, diversity, and institutional responsibility in American higher education. On the one hand, Gooblar argues that higher education cannot achieve true equity unless colleges and universities center classroom teaching. On the other hand, Gooblar emphasizes that a single classroom cannot make the entire higher educational system equitable. Therefore, while larger social problems remain, he calls on instructors and institutions to take their responsibilities in making the learning environments more responsive to the students that they actually serve instead of the “imaginary students”, who “have long populated our elite institutions: white, male, financially comfortable, able-bodied, and well-educated by the K–12 system” (pp. 17-18). The book is important because it points out that higher education cannot achieve equity by admitting more diverse students alone. The most worth-mentioning point of this book is that it shows “how implementing the right kind of pedagogy, one designed to help all students—including those marginalized by our society and our colleges’ status quo practices—is as achievable as it is necessary” (para. 3).



The book starts with Adrienne Rich’s “Taking Women Students Seriously” (p. 1) and the introduction of the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) program at the City College of New York. This opening grounds Gooblar’s argument in an authentic history of SEEK, which shows what happens when instructors understand that admitting new student populations requires rethinking how classroom teaching works. In

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Chapter 1, “Imaginary Students, Imagined Classrooms,” Gooblar sets up the conceptual foundation for the entire book and explains why the transformation of college teaching has proceeded slowly even though college students have become much more diverse. Gooblar argues that many instructors still design courses for an “imaginary student” in “imagined classrooms,” creating additional barriers for marginalized students. Moreover, Gooblar discusses studies on diversity statements, showing that color-blind pedagogy harms marginalized students by refusing to recognize the barriers they face. Therefore, he recommends the identity-conscious pedagogy to instructors because it recognizes how students’ social identities shape their educational experiences.

In Chapters 2 through 4, Gooblar offers a deep analysis of the psychological repercussions of the unequal educational system on marginalized students. Chapter 2, “Stereotype Threat and Belonging Uncertainty,” explores the two most common and most harmful psychological barriers that prevent marginalized students from fully engaging in college classrooms. The first one is stereotype threat, which happens when students worry that their performance might confirm a negative stereotype about a group they belong to. Gooblar emphasizes that stereotype threat is the extra cognitive and emotional burden placed on students who are aware of negative stereotypes about their group. The second one is belonging uncertainty, which refers to students’ uncertainty about whether they are truly accepted in their classrooms or schools. Gooblar points out that belonging uncertainty comes from students’ beliefs about both themselves and other people’s beliefs about them. To provide instructors with practical suggestions to reduce these barriers, Gooblar introduces “wise interventions” (p. 43), through which instructors can “influence how our students see themselves and their education” (p. 45). Gooblar also emphasizes that instructors should design classrooms to give students clear signals that they are seen as whole persons, supported, and expected to succeed. To minimize the negative impact of stereotype threat, in Chapter 3, “Creating a Growth-Mindset Culture,” Gooblar argues that marginalized students not only need direct reassurance that they belong, but also growth-mindset cultures in the classroom that help them believe they have the potential to be successful. Moreover, Gooblar emphasizes the importance of the instructor’s mindset because students learn what instructors believe about them through classroom design, and this perception affects their performance. To help instructors understand and create a growth-mindset culture, Gooblar also offers four practical strategies, including explicit messages about progress and success, opportunities for practice and feedback, response to poor performance, and the value placed on learning and development. Extensively, in Chapter 4, “Seeing Students Broadly,” Gooblar argues that marginalized students are less vulnerable to stereotype threat and belonging uncertainty and more likely to learn when they can bring more of their whole selves into the classroom.

Chapter 5, “The Psychological Shift: Teaching in a Time of Economic Insecurity,” focuses on how poverty and economic insecurity shape students’ learning because “half of all American undergraduates live in or near poverty” (p. 13). Gooblar analyzes it through three socioecological cues of living in poverty, including scarcity, instability, and stigma. Gooblar argues that although colleges have opened their doors to more first-generation and low-income students, the teaching practices are not enough to help those students succeed. He connects this to “predatory inclusion”, which refers to “the opening of opportunities to populations that had previously been denied access but with exploitative terms that undercut the benefits of those opportunities” (p. 127). Since poverty also creates a psychological shift, Gooblar asks instructors to make their classrooms more predictable, transparent, and classroom-centered to help students pay less or no cognitive tax outside the classroom.

In Chapter 6, “Three Lessons from the Plight of Disabled Students,” Gooblar critically reviews the history of disabled students in higher education to show why equity cannot be achieved solely through separate student-support offices. From this analysis, he draws lessons that apply beyond disability. The first lesson is that institutions should not push responsibility for marginalized students to the margins of the university. Although disability services are important, it is more important to make the classroom more accessible and inclusive for marginalized students, including disabled students. Moreover, when faculty need to accommodate disabled students, they sometimes defend “academic rigor” (p. 180). Gooblar suggests that instead of sticking to one rule or removing all standards, every classroom teaching practice should be weighed against its ability to help every student learn. The third lesson is that instead of waiting for students to request accommodations, instructors should design courses in advance for diverse needs.

Since the primary audience for this book is faculty and institution decision-makers, the last two chapters encapsulate Gooblar’s suggestions for them individually. In Chapter 7, “Ten Principles of Equitable Pedagogical Practice,” Gooblar narrows his theory of equitable teaching down into ten practical principles for instructors, including commit to helping every student learn; work to earn students’ trust; get to know students; invite students to bring their lives into the classroom; build predictable and transparent course structures; create a growth-mindset culture; normalize struggle; downplay competition; provide wise feedback; and plan for diversity. In Chapter 8, “Ten Recommendations for Institutions,” Gooblar argues that colleges and institutions must support equitable pedagogy with funding, staffing, training, and policy. To better support institutions, he offers 10 suggestions, including hiring more faculty, creating stable and secure faculty positions, diversifying the faculty while making equitable pedagogy everyone’s responsibility, investing in centers for teaching and learning, building pedagogy training into graduate programs, incentivizing good teaching, helping faculty know their students, rethinking supplementary offices, promoting departmental cultures of equitable learning, and putting students in a position to succeed.

One limitation of the book is that although Gooblar acknowledges that different groups experience marginalization differently across race, class, gender, disability, and other forms of inequality, he does not provide sufficient group-specific suggestions for instructors and institutions. Although his broad category of “marginalized students” allows him to build a general framework for equitable pedagogy, it risks overlooking the practical differences among marginalized groups. For example, the book begins with Adrienne Rich’s reflections on women students, and Gooblar discusses stereotype threat in relation to women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) majors, but he only offers broad and indirect recommendations for supporting women students.

This book brought the idea that the classroom can become a “location of possibility” from the liberatory tradition of bell hooks’s (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*. It resonates with Adrienne Rich (1979) and Mina Shaughnessy (1976) that classroom teaching is a response to unequal access rather than a neutral delivery of knowledge. Similar to David Labaree’s (2017) *A Perfect Mess*, Gooblar also recognizes the stratified and prestige-driven structure of American higher education, but he focuses more on pedagogy as a site of repair to the harms produced by unequal institutions. Building on Corbin Campbell’s (2023) teaching-improvement frame in *Great College Teaching*, Gooblar reframes it as a more justice-centered frame focused on equitable pedagogy. As a follow-up to Gooblar’s (2019) earlier book, *The Missing Course: Everything They Never Taught You About College*, this book focuses more on how better teaching can make college more equitable for marginalized students, whereas the earlier book was about how college instructors can become better teachers (Gooblar, 2024).

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About the Reviewer

Yingyuan Sun is a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her work explores how mentorship, institutional structures, and generative AI shape students' academic identity trajectories and identity development. Since 2021, she has served as a graduate research assistant, administrative associate, and co-coordinator of the Youth Board at the Center of Racial Justice and Youth-engaged Research, UMass Amherst, co-creating a youth-centered space with/for high school students in Western Massachusetts and neighboring areas. Her current research examines youth leadership development, youth participatory action research 2.0, and the publication-socialization experiences of international doctoral students. Her work has been presented at the American Educational Research Association and the Comparative and International Education Society. She serves as chair of publicity and communications for the Journal of Equity & Excellence in Education, and as an executive member of the AERA Division G graduate committee. She is also a Co-PI for the SUMERU: One Thought, One Thousand Worlds, an interdisciplinary, education- and research-oriented transmedia interactive narrative and serious game project with Northeastern University.



About the Author

David Gooblar holds a PhD in English (2008) from the University College London. He is an Associate Professor of English and Director of General Education Literature at the University of Iowa. Gooblar oversees about 150 sections of the Interpretation of Literature (ENGL:1200). This course introduces around 3000 Iowa undergraduates to the mysteries of literary reading every year and plays a vital role in helping scores of graduate instructors become better teachers. He is the author of *The Missing Course: Everything They Never Told You about College Teaching*. From 2013-2020, he wrote a column on college teaching for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He writes occasional pieces at his newsletter, *Pedagogy Unbound*, <https://pedagogyunbound.beehiiv.com/>.



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