Rethinking College Student Retention by John M. Braxton et al. (review)

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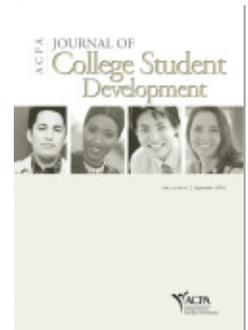
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to see the path toward a more egalitarian future just described. However, we agree with Audre Lorde (2007) who suggested that, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 110). It could not have been easy for Dr. Kimmel, for example, to interview men with whom he so fundamentally disagreed. We, therefore, honor Kimmel's modeling the behavior of treating those with whom we disagree with openness, love, and compassion. This in no way excuses angry White men from responsibility, nor does it delegitimize our own anger and frustration in working with those who have caused tremendous pain. We believe, however, that history has taught us that tools of love and compassion are both powerful and more appropriate for dismantling oppression.

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Rethinking College Student Retention

John M. Braxton, William R. Doyle, Harold V. Hartley III, Amy S. Hirschy, Willis A. Jones, and Michael K. McLendon

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013, 227 pages, $30.47 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Gavin W. Henning, New England College

The college completion agenda is near the top of the list of priorities for educators, administrators, and policymakers. Given this importance, *Rethinking College Student Retention* by Braxton, Doyle, Hartley III, Hirschy, Jones, and McLendon is a timely text for all higher education educators and officials who are struggling to identify ways to improve retention of college students. The authors' intent is to recommend research-based policies and practices to increase retention grounded in the understanding of student persistence.

The book builds on a series of studies. This sequential argument development is a major strength of the book. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure (1975) serves as the springboard for the research in this text. The authors explain a study by Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) who reviewed the literature to identify studies that validated Tinto's theory. While Tinto revised his theory in 1987 and 1993, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson chose to use the 1975 model as there was little research seeking to validate the older models and "the formulations that characterize Tinto's theory as interactionalist exist in the 1975 formulations" (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley III, Hirschy, Jones, & McClendon, 2013, p. 77). Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson concluded that while there is partial support for Tinto's theory for residential colleges and universities, the theory couldn't explain persistence in commuter institutions. The book's authors continue, outlining the work of Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) who attempted to address the limitations outlined by Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) by revising Tinto's (1975) theory to explain student persistence in residential colleges and universities and in commuter colleges and universities. The validation of the theories developed by Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) is included in the final section of *Rethinking College Student Retention.*

With the goal of developing research-based recommendations in mind, the intended audience includes higher education specialists and generalists who are interested in understanding and addressing student retention such as scholars, policymakers,

and higher education administrators and educators. In order to meet the needs of such a diverse audience, the authors designed the book in a unique way. Rather than first describing their studies and then concluding with recommendations, they begin their book with recommendations. The organization makes readers feel like they are reading the final chapter in a mystery novel first. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the book. Grounded in the authors' research, Part I is entitled Recommendations for Policy and Practice. Chapter 2 in this section focuses on state policy while chapter 3 centers on institutional policy and practice. Chapter 3 is particularly informative for higher education administrators as it includes detailed recommendations to increase retention on campus, including nine imperatives, for all areas within colleges and universities. There are specific recommendations for residential colleges as well as ones for commuter institutions.

Part II: Theoretical and Research Context includes chapters 4-7 which provide the theoretical and research context for student persistence. Chapter 4: Explaining College Student Persistence includes an overview of retention research with specific attention on Tinto's 1975 version of his Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure and its corresponding propositions. While space demands do not allow for a full exploration of all facets of the student retention literature, this chapter does provide a useful summary for those new to this research. Chapter 5 discusses the revision to Tinto's theory for residential colleges and universities while the focus of chapter 6 is the revision of Tinto's theory for commuter colleges and universities. This section concludes with chapter 7 in which the authors describe the design of their studies to test these two revised theories.

Part III: Key Factors in Student Persistence in Residential and Commuter Colleges and Universities includes three chapters. In chapters 8 and 9, the authors describe, in detail, their research validating the efficacy of the revised models of retention in residential and commuter institutions. Statistical details are included in the Appendix rather than the chapters for a smoother flow of the text. Chapter 10 is a conclusion and call for further research.

The organization of the text is one of its strengths. Many texts are intended to be read front to back, cover to cover. Administrators and policymakers often don't have the luxury of this time-consuming approach. *Rethinking College Student Retention* is organized in a way to allow some audiences to focus on the most salient chapters because understanding one chapter isn't dependent upon reading earlier chapters. For example, administrators will have sufficient information to address retention on their campuses simply by reading chapter 3 regarding recommendations for institutional policy and practice. If they wish to learn about the research that supports those recommendations, they can read additional chapters for analysis and background. Scholars and researchers will likely choose to read all chapters in the text as the chapters in Part II describe research validating Tinto's Interactionalist Model and revisions to his theory. Part III outlines the studies that validate the revised retention theories. Readers who prefer a more sequential approach may prefer to start with Part II, followed by Part III, and end with Part I.

Rethinking College Student Retention is an invaluable resource for anyone working to address college student departure. There is sufficient review of literature to provide a base understanding of retention research and the studies that undergird the revisions to Tinto's theory are described in detail allowing the reader to analyze and make her own

critique of revisions. The recommendations for educators, administrators, and policymakers are steeped in research that is logically and clearly presented making the text readable for any type of audience from graduate students to seasoned higher education administrators to retention scholars.

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Advancing Social Justice: Tools, Pedagogies, and Strategies to Transform Your Campus

Tracy Davis and Laura M. Harrison

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013, 272 pages, $42.00 (Hardcover)

Reviewed by Claire Kathleen Robbins, Virginia Tech

In the first sentence of *Advancing Social Justice: Tools, Pedagogies, and Strategies to Transform Your Campus,* Tracy Davis and Laura M. Harrison explain "[t]his book is about theorizing and practicing social justice education differently" (Davis & Harrison, 2013, p. xvii). Addressed to faculty, practitioners, and students, the text outlines a framework to advance "a sustainable social justice agenda in the twenty-first century" (p. xx). Emphasizing humility, individual meaning making, process, uses of power, and systemic and structural issues, the authors nickname this framework "Social Justice 2.0," a technological metaphor that

illustrates the need for a new perspective and the "unfinished" nature of social justice education. The authors define social justice as "an attempt to establish integrity between mission and action" (p. 22) in classrooms, institutions, and society at large.

In chapter 1, the authors begin by deconstructing epistemological assumptions. Critiquing positivist ways of knowing, the authors advance what they describe as a "postpositivist framework" in which "reality is understood as constructed, which raises questions about the *constructor*" (p. 4). Participatory research is offered as an epistemological alternative in which knowledge is co-constructed through *praxis*, a cycle of reflection and transformative action (Freire, 1970). Chapter 2 defines social justice, distinguishes between equity and equality, and offers 38 core concepts as an initial "toolkit." Situating these concepts in prior social justice education scholarship, the authors invite readers to "treat these terms as sites of engagement, debate, and reconstruction if necessary" (Davis & Harrison, 2013, p. 26) and then map connections between social identity construction, intersectionality, and structures of power, oppression, and inequality.

Chapter 3 traces the history of social (in) justice in U.S. higher education. Davis and Harrison succinctly outline higher education's legacy of exclusion from the colonial era through the present, chart the history of affirmative action, and consider possibilities and limitations of educational policy as a remedy for past discrimination. Modeling praxis, the authors weave critical reflection questions into the chapter (e.g., "If you didn't already know these facts, why is this the first time you have heard them?" p. 55). In chapter 4, the authors introduce critical pedagogy as a "fundamental foundation for social justice education and action" (p. 100), discussing