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Review of Laura I. Rendón's "Sentipensante (Seeing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation"

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In her book, *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation*, author, educator, and Fetzer Institute Fellowship alumnus Laura I. Rendón lays the framework and provides the rationalization for the need for higher education professionals to embrace and integrate the concepts of "wholeness, consonance, social justice, and liberation" (p. 2) in teaching and learning. The basis of her argument centers around, and is drawn from, her own personal experiences from her formative education years, her undergraduate years, to her years as a scholar and an educator. This body of work explores the relationship between the "outer experience of intellectualism and rational analysis and the inner dimension of insight, emotion, and awareness" (p. 2) and seeks to empower its readers to embrace this new pedagogical phenomenon, one that was previously rejected or dismissed as non-scholarly, philosophical rhetoric.

Rendón opens the book with an introduction detailing the purpose of her writing, provides the core questions surrounding her work, and outlines the organization of the book and its subsequent chapters. It is in the introduction that the reader gains insight into the impetus for writing the book. Rendón explored her own thought processes, first as a student, and then as an educator, and explained how she always adhered to standard teaching and learning pedagogy because that is how it had always been done; never would she have thought to challenge the status quo. She had an epiphany after the death of a colleague and friend forced her to the realization that in order to find the proper balance in teaching, learning, and life, she had to change the school of thought surrounding education as it has always been known and as it has always been done. Her inquiry and interviews with 15 higher education professional from both two and four year institutions all emphasize her belief that education has lost its "deeper, relationship-centered essence" (p. 2) and needs to be refocused to encompass the whole self, rather than just on the intellectual and rational aspects of those being taught.

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The remainder of the introduction seeks to define and identify *spirituality* as it relates to higher education, acknowledges the opposition to accepting pedagogical methods that embrace thinking not deemed rational or intellectual, provides a brief history of pedagogic theory and history, makes the case for "the spiritual in today's society and in our educational institutions" (p. 18), and informs the reader that Rendón is not alone in her

efforts to transform higher education and “refashion” teaching and learning overall.

The first chapter, “Prelude to a New Pedagogical Dreamfield,” does just as the titles says; this chapter introduces the reader to and charts seven agreements, or widely accepted beliefs, that have been practiced in higher education for centuries, and that Rendón’s new pedagogical methodology seeks to debunk. The agreements to privilege intellectual/rational knowing, separation, competition, perfection, monoculturalism, outer work, and avoidance of self-examination and their context in American higher education are explained in detail. Following each explanation, Rendón enlightens the reader by providing personal insight, incorporating widely known and practiced theoretical frameworks, and discussing prior research related to each agreement, all before providing a newly constructed agreement to incorporate and encompass her proposed pedagogical method of teaching and learning “that speak to who we are as whole human beings--- intelligent, social, emotional, and spiritual” (p. 48).

The second chapter, albeit short, introduces the readers to the faculty interviewed by Rendón as she embarked upon a “learning inquiry” (p. 51) in which she ultimately recognized that her purpose was in alignment with the interviewees’ purpose in teaching and learning and that listening to these stories inspired her and evoked a sense of passion and courage to continue the work she had set out to do. In essence, the faculty stories validated her inquiry and purpose for doing so. Just as with any reputable research methodology, Rendón outlines her criterion for participant selection, including her desire for diversity in gender, race/ethnicity, academic discipline, and institutional type. Faculty members included all had prior experience in teaching and learning in ways viewed as holistic, rather than in the traditional methods of most.

Two approaches to teaching and learning emerged from Rendón’s interviews with faculty participants and frame the next two chapters, with one approach being discussed in each chapter. The first such approach, or “pedagogical vision” (p. 65), is based on and embodies two themes, which are integration and consonance. Based on recurring themes in faculty interview responses, faculty reported a belief that internal and external, or inner and outer, learning are connected, and that contemplative practices are imperative to ensure learners are engaged and associate deeper levels of meaning with course content. Inner learning encompasses emotion and reflection, while outer learning refers to intellect, reasoning, and academic concepts; faculty recognize the need to integrate these two learning methods, rather than have them operate singularly. Those faculty who embraced this integration of learning saw and expressed appreciation in the value of teaching and learning that appealed to and drew from both inner and outer learning, and discussed the ways in which they combined these processes in their classroom to ensure students employed both emotional and intellectual intelligence in their academic environment. Faculty discussed methods by which learning took place in their classrooms to engage students both intellectually and emotionally. Some of these methods took the form of storytelling, meditation, music, personal reflection, and off-site retreats. Rendón notes that the faculty employing this particular method “positioned themselves not so much as experts but as facilitators of learning” (p. 83), all while ensuring the integrity and rigor of the academic content was not lost in this non-traditional, holistic method of teaching and learning. The overall goal, according to the faculty, is for students to not only gain knowledge necessary to excel academically, but to gain wisdom that can manifest itself in areas of life outside of academia.

The second approach, detailed in chapter four, extends beyond integration and consonance and incorporates social justice as a pedagogic method in teaching and learning. Faculty who embraced this second approach, rather than the first one, went beyond the concepts of integration and consonance, emphasizing activism, liberation, healing, and social change in their pedagogical practices. Rendón introduces the readers to this second approach through the lens of two faculty members: an English instructor at a community college working with low-income, first generation college students, and an art education instructor at a state-supported university who uses so-

cial activism and community service learning to engage his students and foster a deeper understanding of the course material. As explained in this chapter, social justice is at the forefront of teaching and learning in certain situations. For instance, Rendón explains that “social justice becomes a theme anytime faculty work with underserved students” (p. 92). In this case, underserved refers to low-income, first generation, and/or underrepresented students. Faculty employing this second approach justify their decision to do so in order to liberate their students from “invalidating, self-limiting beliefs about their ability to succeed” (p. 93), beliefs engrained in them throughout their life. Pedagogical methods discussed and utilized in the classrooms following this approach include using writing as a contemplative practice tool, participatory epistemology, encouraging service learning activities, and other activities that allows students to see the interconnectedness of their background and cultural heritage and their learning.

Rendón opens chapter five, a chapter describing the experiences of faculty opting to employ new pedagogical methods, with an appropriate quote by Hillel: “If not now, when? If not me, who?” In her words, “doing things differently in the face of resistance is an act of courage” (p. 111). With change comes resistance, especially in an institution as large as the American higher education system. This chapter details the decision by some faculty to break away from the traditional methods of pedagogy and embrace new, holistic methods of teaching in order to reach the greatest number of students possible and ensure they leave as whole persons, a decision not entered upon lightly and not viewed favorably by colleagues, and in some cases, administrators. Rendón highlights some of the more important lessons learned by faculty who chose to take this path of “pedagogical dissent” (p. 113). Of the lessons that emerged, the following resonated with Rendón throughout her interviews with faculty and students: the importance of setting high standards for learning; understanding that learning is a never-ending process that cannot be confined to one term, one semester, or one academic year; providing students with constructive feedback is not only important, but needed, in order to develop a student’s sense of wholeness; and having confidence in and trusting one’s teaching abilities will ensure the production of highly competent, self-reflective learners. This chapter ends with testimonials from students expressing their appreciation for the faculty who chose to be defiant and address the need to nurture a student’s wholeness through holistic pedagogical practices versus the traditional methods of teaching, learning, and assessment of student performance.

The last two chapters of Rendón’s book define her pedagogical approach and call on faculty to embrace this new method in hopes of appealing to and educating the whole student, intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally. Rendón coined the term *sentipensante*, which means sensing and thinking, to describe the pedagogical method that emerged from her learning inquiry. Her *Sentipensante Pedagogy*, detailed in chapter six, represents a teaching and learning approach based on “wholeness, harmony, social justice, and liberation” (p. 132) and was developed based on personal inquiry and experiences in employing this method in her own teaching and learning practices. Rendón frames the development of her pedagogy around 10 key questions, questions she says that every faculty member should ask of themselves prior to incorporating wholeness and consonance in their pedagogical methods.

Rendón concludes her book focusing on and speaking to those faculty who choose to accept the challenge of defying tradition to embark upon a pedagogical journey towards wholeness, social justice and liberation. She begins by explaining the most common questions asked of her about her pedagogical beliefs and answers these questions candidly, noting to those who are called, that this journey is by no means an easy one and that “on the way to transforming education and to realizing a new pedagogical dream, our hearts are bound to be broken” (p. 151). But, she issues the call and the challenge to those who accept to do so wholeheartedly, as the ends will ultimately justify the means, in her opinion.

This book is one that I would recommend to others. Rendón's writing is clear, concise, and easy to follow. Her method of internalizing the content, while simultaneously integrating relevant literature and theory, reflect her status as a seasoned authority within the field of higher education. The content appeals to educators from all levels, not just higher education. Those educators who dare to be different, or who are not threatened by the consequences of doing so, would greatly benefit from reading her text and incorporating some of the pedagogical practices discussed in their own teaching and learning practices.

Dr. Rendón's book is a valuable addition to the body of literature regarding holistic teaching practices in education. She poses many questions throughout her seven chapters that provoke thought in the reader. Educators struggling with how to employ similar methods in their classrooms would benefit greatly from having read and responded to the questions posed. Likewise, graduate students contemplating a career in teaching would also benefit from reading this book, as the topic discussed can shed light on teaching and learning using an approach unlike the traditional methods of higher education. Students, educators, and education as a whole are not the same as they were at the inception of institutions of higher education; Rendón's *Sentipensante Pedagogy* recognizes that and allows for adaptation of pedagogical methods that take this fact into consideration.

References

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Biography



Natasha Molet Worthington, MAEd, is currently a student in the doctoral program in Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. Her area of concentration is Higher Education Administration, and her research interests include community college to university transfer student success post matriculation and transfer immersion program effectiveness.

Over the past 10 years, Ms. Worthington has worked in higher education as an instructor, teaching both curriculum and developmental composition and literature courses, business communication, technical writing, academic success, study skills, and basic skills courses at several community colleges and four-year institutions across the state of North Carolina. She is very passionate about education, and has committed herself to being both a lifelong learner and educator.