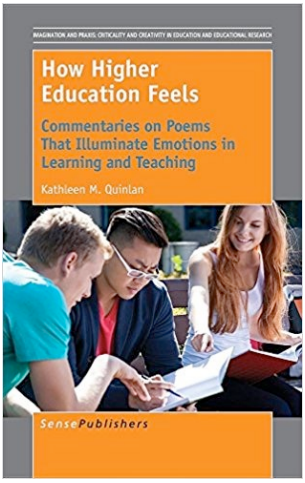

How Higher Education Feels: Commentaries on Poems That Illuminate Emotions in Learning and Teaching

Quinlan, Kathleen M.
Sense Publishers, 2016

Book Review

Tags: affective learning | higher education | teaching with the arts

Reviewed by: Shivraj Mahendra
Date Reviewed: October 18, 2017

Studies in higher education seem to have given limited attention to the emotional aspect of the teaching-learning experience. Emotion has, nearly for the greatest part, been isolated from cognition. Underlining this distrust of emotion in academia, *How Higher Education Feels,* explores the less charted trails of emotional dimensions of teaching and learning. Holding to the hypothesis that emotions cannot be separated from rational engagements, the book attempts to demonstrate how emotion is deeply intertwined with thinking and reasoning in higher education. This book is thus about journeying with, and reflecting upon, the emotional landscapes of courses we teach and students we impact.

The first two chapters set the stage and agenda of the book by outlining the need for study of emotions in higher learning, the methodology with which to explore emotional experiences, the significance of poetry in relation to emotions, and the conceptual tools used to examine the role of emotions. A teacher's regulation of his or her own emotions in the context of student-centered teaching is a key element in the discussion.

The next nine chapters each include ten to fifteen poems that address specific themes of experience in university education. Some of the key themes include: transition to higher education, taking care of students and ourselves (teachers), love of people and culture, love of arts and or science, success and failure, and introspection and retrospection. The poems were compiled to serve as case studies expressing and illustrating various feelings in relation to significant aspects of learning, teaching, and development. They are rich in content and language, duly accompanied by brief commentaries as well as a well-researched expert

commentary that places the poems in their specific contexts. They are simple and complex, metered and irregular compositions just like the life and moods of many academics. Poems are personal and touching, deep and sensitive, and quite successfully serve the purpose of the book.

While the poetry is meant to serve as case studies in emotion and feelings, the book seems to become a compilation of poems rather than a pedagogical discourse. Thankfully the commentaries, especially the expert commentaries, rescue the reader from being lost in the anthology of poems. The theoretical framework is also well conceptualized and the final chapter recaptures the mission of the monograph. It successfully shows the importance of emotion in experiences of higher learning from enrollment to graduation and beyond. It further shows the centrality of emotion and feelings of a student in relationship with subject, with teachers, with peers, and with self – all summed up, in this study, in poetic expressions.

As the compiler of this groundbreaking work, Kathleen Quinlan of Oxford Learning Institute, deserves appreciation for pointing attention to an important direction in higher education – the centrality of emotion and its powerful expression in poetry. She has liberated emotion in education from being the sole property of psychology and opened it up, with the help of poetry, for reflection on its socio-cultural contexts. How higher education feels? It feels terrifically poetic!

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/how-higher-education-feels-commentaries-on-poems-that-illuminate-emotions-in-learning-and-teaching/

Published by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion
301 West Wabash Ave, Crawfordsville, IN 47933
(765) 361-6047 (800) 655-7177 fax (765) 361-6051
Fully Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and Located at Wabash College