

# BOOK REVIEW

Critical Pedagogical Narratives of Long-Term Incarcerated Juveniles: Humanizing the Dehumanized. By Gregory Barraza (2022), 142 pages. ISBN: 978-1-66691-294-4. Lanham MD: Lexington Books.

In *Critical Pedagogical Narratives of Long-Term Incarcerated Juveniles: Humanizing the Dehumanized*, Gregory Barraza invites the readers to take a critical look at the world of long-term incarcerated juveniles and to adopt a more humanizing gaze at the young lives by considering a broader context of systemic issues and societal neglect that shape the complex intersection of lived experience, education, and incarceration, and how all these aspects transform the lives of one of the most vulnerable segments of the population. The book is divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1, *The Dehumanization of the Marginalized Student*, introduces the readers to the context of the study. Through statistical data and qualitative insights, Barraza illustrates how punitive measures, dehumanizing language and practice, and societal attitudes perpetuate a cycle of trauma and despair for marginalized communities, disproportionately affecting the youth of color and actively pushing them down the school-to-prison pipeline. Barraza argues for the use of the concept of critical pedagogy as a transformative framework with which to make sense of the experiences of currently or formerly incarcerated juveniles and the juvenile justice education system.

Chapter 2, *Inside Voices*, focuses on the methodological approaches employed in the study. Advocating for the use of arts-based research, Barraza argues that this methodology creates space for long-term incarcerated juveniles to exercise their agency and express their voices through artistic representations of their lived experiences. The use of fictive narratives and poems co-created by the author and the research participants creates a window through which the readers can get a glimpse of how the lives of the incarcerated juveniles were affected by their individual experiences and invites the audience to reflect critically on the experiences.

Chapter 3, *Loss and Surrender*, introduces the first three characters of the study – two juveniles and an administrator. The fictive narratives emphasize the theme of loss and surrender that surfaced in many areas of the lives of long-term incarcerated juveniles, including time, death, relationships, and love. Before leading the readers on the journey into the personal narratives of long-term incarcerated juveniles, Barraza provides an analysis of the methodological approaches to help the readers make sense of the story of each character. Through the fictive narratives crafted skillfully by Barraza to present the voices and experiences of the juveniles and to humanize a demographic that is often demonized and reduced to statistics, the readers are offered an opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the complex challenges and struggles faced by the juveniles, shedding light on the failure of the system to equitably attend to the needs of this vulnerable group of the population.

Chapter 4, *Mental Health and Criminality*, similar to Chapter 3, provides heart-wrenching fictive narratives of the other three characters. Unlike Chapter 3, Barraza attends less to the methodological approaches than to analyzing the incarcerated juveniles' narratives, situating their stories and experiences within relevant theoretical lenses and state policies. Backed up by strong evidence, Barraza convincingly argues how undiagnosed mental health issues of the youth, including schizophrenia, were the main drivers that pushed them to engage in criminal behaviors in the first place. Government measures to address youth criminality, such as zero-tolerance policies, argues Barraza, have done nothing but hastened marginalized juveniles' journey through the school-to-prison pipeline. The chapter highlights the severe shortcomings of existing policies and the human cost of the implementation of these measures and humanizes the incarcerated juveniles who have ended up being incarcerated due to reasons or factors beyond their control.

Chapter 5, *Poetry as Reflection*, provides an insightful, artistic, and heart-felt reflection by Barraza on the emotions and experiences of the incarcerated juveniles he interviewed for this book. Highlighting the importance of poetry in academic research and its value in expressing the human experience, Barraza makes a powerful use of poems to emphasize the fluid relationship between freedom and truth, focusing particularly on the intersection between human experience, identity, and society.

Chapter 6, *Rehabilitate the Rehabilitation*, concludes the book, summarizing key insights from the study and highlighting the transformative potential of using a humanizing approach in juvenile justice education. Barraza outlines several crucial and necessary actional steps for scholars, educators, policymakers, and society at large to engage in reshaping the narratives, policies, and practices related to juvenile incarceration and juvenile justice education. The chapter also appeals for a collective responsibility to create a more just, equitable, and compassionate society for one of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

One of the strengths of Barraza's work is his use of a critical pedagogical approach as a transformative force within juvenile justice education; it is empowering and allows the long-term incarcerated juveniles to re-construct their identities and envisage a future in post-incarceration. The pedagogy also challenges policymakers, educators, and the wider public to re-evaluate their approaches and perceptions of vulnerable youth. Barraza's methodological approaches, particularly the use of fictive narratives and poems, not only humanize this often dehumanised demographic but also allow the juveniles to express their voices, creating space for them to exercise their critical consciousness and agency. Moreover, the narratives enable the readers to gain a more in-depth understanding of the complexities faced by the vulnerable youth and are a powerful instrument in fostering empathy among the readers. However, the book could benefit from a little more extensive exploration of the diversity of experiences within the incarcerated juvenile population, particularly the experiences of female juveniles and possibly of Caucasian youth as well. This would have provided an insightful comparison of the experiences and a more complete picture of juvenile incarceration and the juvenile justice education system. Nonetheless, these minor shortcomings are far outweighed by the power of narratives, critical pedagogical approach to education and scholarship, and systemic change in humanizing the currently or formerly long-term incarcerated juveniles, as portrayed, envisioned, and outlined by Barraza in this book. It is a must-read for educators, policymakers, scholars, and anyone interested in and committed to fostering a more just, equitable, and compassionate society for all.

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