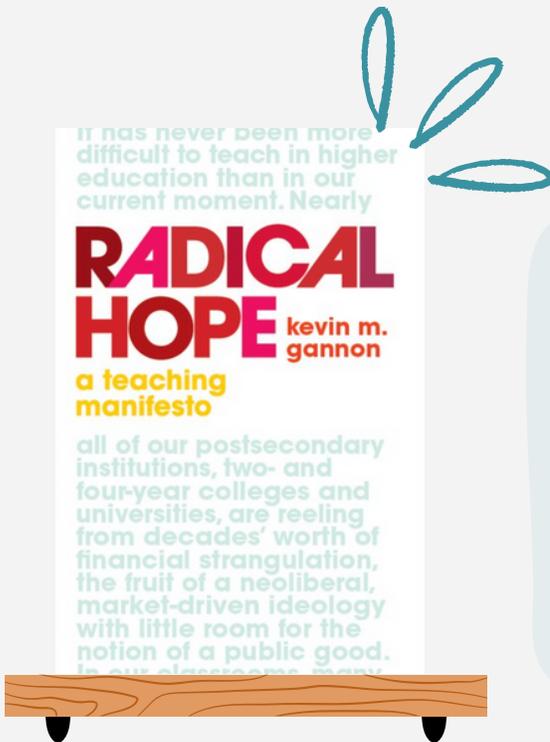


Radical Hope

Discussion Guide

The OTL Book Club read and discussed *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* (Gannon, 2020) in Summer 2021. You can use this document to guide your own reading or start a book club with colleagues. These questions were written by educational developers from the Office of Teaching and Learning at the University of Guelph to help facilitate discussions.



About This Book

In *Radical Hope*, Gannon argues that teaching can be a radical act that can address many of the difficult issues facing higher education. The book addresses difficult issues from a theoretical and practical perspective. Chapters focus on topics including power and privilege in the classroom, inclusive and accessible teaching, and encouraging student agency.

Discussion Questions

Introduction



1. Gannon argues that “teaching is a radical act of hope” (p.7) because teaching requires faith in a better future that we cannot yet see. Do you see teaching as a hopeful act? When do you feel hopeful when you teach? When do you feel despair when you teach?
2. How do we get 'institutions' to commit to radical hope without sounding tone deaf to the actual issues facing higher education?



Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: Classrooms of Death

1. On pages 18-19, the author describes an extreme version of the classroom of death, where knowledge is delivered to students in 'chunks' to students who have no agency in their learning. How can we as educators work to reject this view of education?
2. 'Life affirming' education, or the Dutch idea of the 'school for life', emphasizes preparing students to be good citizens who contribute to cultural growth, focuses on subjects with practical applications, and emphasizes access. How does this philosophy compare to the philosophy of your discipline? Is it soul killing or life giving?

Chapter 2: The Things We Tell Our Students

1. Do you engage your students as “active partners in a mutual project of higher learning”? (p. 31). If so, what strategies or approaches do you use to implement that perspective? Do you explain this approach or this philosophy to students?
2. Consider the following thought exercise “Ask yourself: if one of your courses could talk—using everything except your voice— what would it tell your students?” (p. 31). Would the message be the same for every student in your courses?
3. Thinking of your own courses or other courses in your discipline, or programs, can you identify any “draconian requirements inflicted in the name of rigor”? (p. 33).

Chapter 3: Cultivating Transformative Teaching

1. Gannon argues that instructor-focused teaching can dehumanize students. How do you or could 'humanize' your teaching practice?
2. If you agree that transformational learning is better than transactional learning, where do we begin to create space for transformational learning to occur? How do we challenge the status quo? Did the pandemic start a shift that put our humanity at the center in education?

Discussion Questions

Chapter 4: Teaching and Learning Inclusively

1. What approaches do you use (or have you seen used) for sending the message to all students that 'you are welcome here'?
2. What is your 'preferred student' type? How are learning spaces shaped for our 'preferred students'? Have you ever found yourself (consciously or unconsciously) teaching to your “preferred student”? How can we make sure the “least preferred student” (Industrial-Organizational Psychology term) also feel that they belong?

Chapter 5: Making Access Means Something

1. An overhaul for Universal Design for Learning (UDL) course design is a large undertaking. Where are some places you can start small with incorporating UDL in your courses? What strategies could you use now that won't require full re-design? How do we intentionally create spaces where we can use our power to work “in the interest of justice, equality and freedom” (p. 82) with respect to accessibility in course design?
2. How can faculty become more aware of how they might be marginalizing students and creating an inequitable learning environment (with respect to access)?

Chapter 6: Encouraging Choice, Collaboration & Agency

1. Have you offered students choice? What choices have you offered them? What advice would you give about offering students choice? Is there any circumstance when offering choice does not benefit the students?
2. What did you think of the 'unessay' assignment? Is it something you would consider doing or have done? If you've have done something like this, how did students feel about it? How did grading work?

Discussion Questions

Chapter 7: A Syllabus Worth Living

1. What are your thoughts on the suggestions for creating a 'promising syllabus' (alternatively, a learner-centred syllabus)? Have you used any strategies to make your syllabi less technical and more welcoming?

Chapter 8: Pedagogy Is NOT a Weapon

1. What strategies could we use instead of or in addition to trigger or content warnings to make sure our classrooms do not traumatize or re-traumatize students?
2. How do brave spaces differ from safe spaces for you? Beyond the criticisms of safe spaces identified in the book, what other challenges exist when we try to create safe spaces (instead of focusing on brave spaces)?

Chapter 9: Platforms and Power

1. What hardships are today's college students facing that are different than challenges that previous generations faced? How are we acknowledging those hardships in our teaching policies and practices?

Chapter 10: I Don't Know...Yet

1. What university or course policies might contribute to students feeling like failure is a bump in the road, versus an end to their academic career?
2. In your courses, how do you give students safe opportunities to take risks and to fail? What options do students have available to them in your courses should they fail an assignment?
3. How can we serve as stewards of the learning environment (rather than central experts)?



Radical Hope

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Suggested Strategies

Radical Hope contains a diverse array of strategies to help create a supportive and impactful classroom environment for your students. Below we have selected a few strategies highlighted in the book alongside their respective page numbers. We encourage you to dive deeper into the book and explore the larger collection of useful strategies and techniques to transform your classroom.

Strategy

Description

Page

Diversity Syllabus Check	Assess course materials in your syllabus and ensure they accurately reflect the diversity within your field.	69
Course Material Accessibility Check	Assess course materials so that they meet institutional and governmental accessibility guidelines.	83
Design Alternate Forms of Assessment	Redesign high stakes assessments that allow students to choose how they will demonstrate fulfilling the learning goals.	95
Options For Growth in Course	Give students options to rewrite, resubmit, failed assignments for partial grade.	147