

Stannard-Friel, D. (2017). *Street teaching in the Tenderloin: Jumpin' down the rabbit hole*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. 403 pp.

### Review by Patrick M. Green

The idea of bringing the classroom to the community—literally walking the streets and talking to its residents—moves the concept of service-learning to a different level in higher education. Have you ever wondered what the classroom would be like when it is completely flipped into the community? How would service-learning look when it is conducted in the community space rather than the four walls of the classroom? What would the classroom environment be when students engage with community members by walking the streets of the community, meeting with “street teachers,” and listening to the sounds of reality delivered by stark poverty and complex community issues? In Don Stannard-Friel’s compelling book *Street Teaching in the Tenderloin*, you enroll in his class and take such a journey.

This book is not simply a walk through the Tenderloin District, a high-crime, low-income neighborhood in San Francisco “where children who live here normalize sex work, street crime, homelessness, poverty, and the deaths of young friends by suicide or murder” (pp. xix–xx), but rather an expedition into the complexity of a society through community-based learning. As Stannard-Friel, a professor of sociology, explains, this text “tells the story of my encounters, usually accompanied by students, with a wide variety of people who became our teachers in the Tenderloin” as well as the story of “my students learning inner-city life by becoming a part of it” (p. xix). Over the course of 16 chapters, he explores this place-based approach to engagement through discussion of complex community issues; explicit profiles of community members, street teachers, and students; the articulation of community tensions; and introductions to a variety of community programs and nonprofit organizations. From the stark photograph on the cover, Stannard-Friel invites the reader to “jump down the rabbit hole,” a metaphor for deep investigation and immersion into the reality of a community hanging out on the streets—with all of its complexity.

He begins each chapter with a poignant photograph that encourages reflection related to the community topic. Stannard-Friel delves into personal stories, including the narratives of street teachers, organizations, communities, and students. Interrogating social issues through narratives, alongside relevant data and statistics, is a *modus operandi* employed widely throughout this volume.

To be clear, the author offers no resolution to the challenges he surfaces. Rather, exploration of the complex issues of racism, abuse, the drug culture, and refugee resettlement are explicated through personal stories of immigrants and refugees, gang members, sex workers, students, and inmates, all in the context of a college class. Walking through the streets and listening to street teachers is the methodology of his community-based learning courses. In the process, fundamental questions are asked explicitly from a community-based perspective.

For example, in a variety of chapters, he discusses the population of Cambodian refugees who live in the neighborhood. A brief historical overview of how the refugees fled the Khmer Rouge and traveled to the United States leads to significant questions, such as, “What was our government *thinking* when it relocated poor, war-weary refugees from a largely rural, agricultural, village-based Cambodian community . . . to poverty-stricken urban slums?” (p. 25). Interspersing narratives of individuals (both community street teachers and students) with an overview of historical context and community data allows the author to pose such significant questions from a community-based perspective.

This volume is structured with distinct chapters, and individual chapters are framed in varying ways: around a street teacher or student narrative, or community issues such as sex workers, mental health, drugs, or homelessness and poverty. The interplay between excerpts in the chapter featuring data, historical context, and individual profiles provides an environment for the reader that effectively simulates what it must be like to be in the class with Stannard-Friel. The author also frames some excerpts with names of the courses that provided them: “Streetwise Sociology,” “Inner World of the Inner City,” “Deviant Behavior,” or “Promise of the Inner City.” He uses these to share stories about the students’ journey walking the streets. Yet Stannard-Friel avoids creating a binary us–them framework by connecting the lives of his students with the lives of people in the neighborhood. Many of his students have come to college having experienced trauma from suicide, drugs, abuse, poverty, prostitution, or gangs, like the street teachers. Unafraid of big questions, he explores such community–student observations throughout his text and digs into social analysis, thoughtfully proposing that root causes demand social responses to struggles that individuals face. Like a student walking with him during class, through Stannard-Friel’s analytical narrative the reader experiences the connections between people, historical context, and social structures. The intended outcome of

social analysis and a justice orientation that is often attributed to community-based learning courses and their learning outcomes is clearly modeled through this text.

As the author explores complex community issues and problems in his courses, he also shares stories of site visits to community organizations or prisons, and of the myriad reactions from his students. His approach to community-based learning is not articulated, but rather demonstrated through narratives. Stories of specific service-learning programs, such as Halloween in the Tenderloin and College Night in the Tenderloin, are shared, along with various narratives of street teachers and students. Stannard-Friel shares examples of community immersions as well, in which students stay at the single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel managed by a nonprofit organization. He considers each point of interaction the students have to be an “encounter,” whether it be walking through a group drinking and smoking pot or offhand comments made at the students. Yet he artfully connects experiences to community context throughout the volume, articulating statistics and data to color and shape the narrative.

The big questions Stannard-Friel sprinkles throughout the stories challenge the reader, as they do his students:

Who are the street people? Where do they come from?  
Why are they here? What are their lives like? Are they  
lazy? Are they dangerous? Are they drug addicts? Are  
they all homeless? Are they crazy? Are they no-good  
people who “choose” to “live off the rest of us”? (p. 228)

He spends much of the book challenging assumptions inherent within these questions through his stories of students and street teachers. For example, when a student interacts with a street teacher who is transgender and presenting in the classroom, and the student has many questions after class, Stannard-Friel points out, “My student left the lecture, pondering a new idea. Real-life lessons can happen anywhere, even in the classroom” (p. 231). The walls of the classroom are not just blurred, but removed, as street teachers are invited into the classroom and the class walks the neighborhood. By approaching community-based learning from this perspective, Stannard-Friel demonstrates that listening to the community is the point of entry for framing big assertions, such as: “We put trafficked tweens in juvenile detention, then, after living the life from 12 to 18, we declare them to be criminal adults. We create our own problems. Then we blame the victims” (p. 276). There is an oppor-

tunity here for Stannard-Friel to use such observations to raise the larger epistemological question of who holds and creates knowledge. Although there are inherent suggestions in the modality of privileging street teachers and listening by walking through the Tenderloin, that methodology is not interrogated in this volume—a missed opportunity.

Stannard-Friel frames his pedagogical approach as community-based learning explicitly. His definition of this “transformative experience” is the difference. He bridges the intense learning experience with relationships in the community, connecting reflection on the experience with learning from the street teachers. His approach is one of integrative learning, linking community-based learning experiences with scholarship on social problems to disorient and reorient students’ frame of reference. He models this throughout his book with his stories of students and street teachers, but he pushes the pedagogical approach further. A more direct explanation of this pedagogy would enhance the value of this book in the education field. For example, this book could contribute to the canon on teaching and learning with a clear articulation of methodological approaches in the classroom, logistical approaches for successful implementation, implications for access and inclusivity with diverse identities or marginalized student populations, and an expression of integrative learning as an important goal for student learning.

In his concluding chapter, Stannard-Friel proposes a new way of teaching in community-based learning. Specifically, he proposes a “pedagogy of compassion”:

This definition of “pedagogy” is not a traditional one, nor is it one that I have articulated to others, or even to myself, over the many years that I have been teaching, but it is one that, in reflection, I have been *using* in the Tenderloin for 20 years. (p. 334)

Echoing the words of Mark K. Smith, he reframes such a pedagogy of compassion to include “accompanying learners; caring for and about them; and bringing learning into life” (p. 334). Through our connections with each other, building relationships with the community, learning is brought into real life. His point, though, is that learning is not just a social experience, but also a shared human experience. The personal stories shared in this volume—from students to the Tenderloin community—are stories of resilience and transcendence. Sharing personal stories allows others to see

themselves and build compassion for others. This fundamentally changes the value proposition of community-based teaching and learning.

With compelling, evocative narratives that require attention, depth, and openness, this book demands commitment. Although it is unconventional in structure, it is appealing for its harsh honesty and blunt reality in regard to learning in the community. Read Stannard-Friel's book for a variety of reasons: to learn a different way of teaching; to identify a unique approach to community-based learning; or to experience, through narratives, a walk through the Tenderloin. Enroll in his class through this book. You will be immersed not only in a community, but in the pedagogy of compassion in action. Know that you will jump down the rabbit hole and reemerge thinking differently about teaching and learning with the community.

### **About the Reviewer**

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