

## Book Review / Compte rendu

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*Unthinkable Laughter: (Re)Imagining Anti-Racist Education* by Laura Mae Lindo. University of Toronto Press, 2025, 258 pages, Paperback. Hardcover and eBook. ISBN: 978-1-4875-5109-4

As educators and policymakers grapple with moving beyond symbolic gestures to address racism, author Laura Mae Lindo proposes a radical shift: What if laughter could be an entry point to truth-telling, healing, and systemic change? In *Unthinkable Laughter*, Lindo argues that laughter is not an escape from seriousness but a lever for critical pedagogical engagement. The book's central premise is both pedagogical and political, asserting that classroom practice cannot be disentangled from the broader policy landscapes and social climates that shape the lives of racialized students. Drawing on her unique dual experience as a former Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) of Ontario and a Black woman educator, Lindo situates her pedagogy within the friction of lived experience and legislative reality.

The book is deliberately scaffolded to carry readers from theoretical foundations toward method, practice and reflection. This structure is essential for an intervention that seeks to transform teacher education. Lindo begins by situating her work within broader scholarship of anti-racist literature, acknowledging that racial discourse is content-dependent and fluid she distinguishes her approach by framing (Dei, 1996). However, she distinguishes her approach by framing emancipatory racial humor as a form of critical public pedagogy. This alignment with Rossing's (2016) theory suggests that humor can serve as a disarming force, exposing and subverting he-

gemonic racial meanings and privilege by injecting counternarratives that challenge dominant frames and facilitate critical reflection.

Lindo's theoretical contribution is most potent in her pairing of psychological and philosophical frameworks. She reads humor across psychology, philosophy, and education to argue that laughter has a double-edged effect. On one hand, it can stabilize group belonging; on the other, it can estrange us from our own common sense when a joke exposes the seam between what we believe and how we live. Her synthesis of Freud's (1976, 1993) pleasure principle with Fanon's (1952) racial epidermal schema is particularly productive. She demonstrates how laughter's release may suddenly curdle when a racialized subject encounters the freezing, classificatory gaze of the state or institution. For Lindo, this insight is pedagogical; the classroom task is to harness laughter's capacity to make contradiction felt, without allowing it re-entrench insider/outsider boundaries or slide back into mere classroom climate. The book also addresses uncomfortable laughter that emerges in pre-service classrooms. Lindo shows how laughter can become a hinge between resistance and reflection, especially when discussions shift from abstract theory to lived, racialized experience. She is explicit about the power dynamics at play when the instructor is racialized. She argues that the transition from distance to reflection must be meti-

culously scaffolded to open honest dialogue without reinscribing harm. This is a necessary challenge to conventional anti-racist methods in Canadian teacher education, such as short workshops or policy-based trainings which Lindo observes often centre guilt and fail to foster transformative change.

Lindo's choice of pedagogical texts including comedic performances by Dave Chappelle and Paul Mooney is strategic. She positions these cultural texts not as mere entertainment but as interventions that confront hegemony directly. Lindo's (2015) earlier work demonstrates the practical application of this approach, showing how comedy enabled teachers to "reflect upon their normalized racial discourses" (p.54) and examine their inner racism. This aligns with McDermott's (2019) use of comedy and satire to build critical apparatus and enable students to learn in to discomfort around racism, sexism, and political debate. This approach is rooted in culturally responsive pedagogy that seeks to honor lived experience and centre the knowledge of marginalized communities. Primbs and Dawson (2023) extend this framework by arguing that stand-up comedy not only critiques existing structures but also engages in prefiguration, modeling alternative decolonial social arrangements and enabling audiences to imagine alternative, decolonial futures. By doing so, Lindo distinguishes her work from diversity education models that treat equity as a technical skill set divorces from historical context. Her narrative as Ontario's first Black critic for colleges and universities further grounds this, reminding the reader that the unthinkable nature of certain laughter is often a reflection of the unthinkable nature of the policies governing racialized bodies.

Regarding style, Lindo write with a directness and courage that is needed in academic texts on policy. Her prose is narrative driven yet analytically rigorous, making the book accessible to pre-service teachers while remaining deeply relevant to seasoned researchers and policy-makers. She does not shy away from the risks of her proposal, acknowledging that comedy can reinforce stereotypes, be misinterpreted, or trivialize serious issues if left unguided. Lindo successfully charts a pathway from comedy to systemic change, a pathway mediated by truth-telling, healing, and collective imagination. Her work places a high demand on the facilitator,

acknowledging that educators must actively guiding students "through the maze of understanding laid out by these race comics" (p.43). A task that requires a high degree of racial literacy and emotional intelligence. For some readers, the transferability of these protocols beyond highly skilled, pre-service settings may remain a lingering question.

Ultimately, *Unthinkable Laughter* represents a significant, yet needed, intervention in anti-racist education. It offers a provocative alternative to guilt-centered trainings and performative commitments. For those committed to meaningful educational reform, Lindo's work offers a necessary challenge: to take seriously the pedagogical potential of comedy, to center joy and pleasure alongside critique and accountability, and to imagine educational practices that are transformative rather than performative. In doing so, Lindo invites us to reimagine education as a practice of collective liberation grounded in the revolutionary potential of laughter.

## REFERENCE

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