

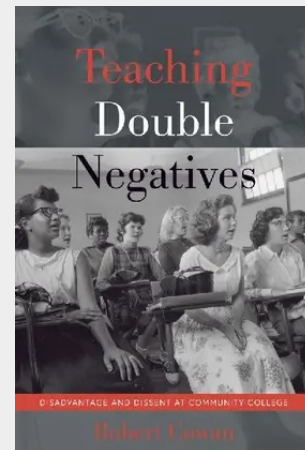
Teaching Double Negatives

Disadvantage and Dissent at Community College

asks whether exploring narratives that subvert dominant Western paradigms of progress in classrooms enables students to re-narrate and represent their lives. In seven years of teaching literature and philosophy at Brooklyn's only community college, Robert Cowan worked with many kinds of disadvantaged students—those on welfare or homeless, single moms and the formerly incarcerated, traumatized war veterans, and immigrants from over 140 countries. These students had many reasons for wanting to dissent from the social norms that sought to define and marginalize them. One might imagine that disadvantaged students would identify with texts that are subversive, challenge dominant race/class/gender paradigms, and try to interrogate the globalized systems in which we live. But do they? Do the philosophies of Debord and Heidegger, the novels of Christa Wolf and Jean Genet, contemporary slave narratives and Dead Kennedys lyrics, poetry by Aimé Césaire and Taliban fighters, actually speak to them? Can you teach dissent to the disadvantaged and produce a positive result?

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