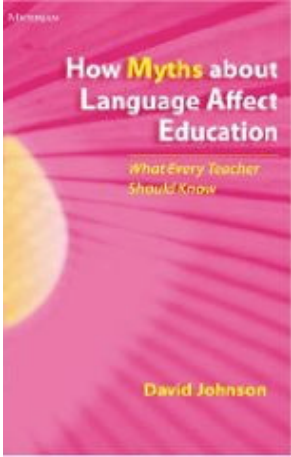


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How Myths about Language Affect Education: What Every Teacher Should Know		
Author:	David Johnson (2008)	
Publisher:	Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press	
Pages	ISBN	Price
Pp. v + 113	978-0-472-03287-7 (paper)	\$22.50 U.S.



How Myths about Language Affect Education is a small but powerful book that examines common stereotypes and misinformation about language and language learning that affect students, instructors, schools, and the general public, especially in U.S. contexts. The thesis of this book is clearly defined by the author who writes: “ESL teachers should work to debunk popular and misguided myths that dominate the general public’s understanding of language” (p. 1). Thus, *Myths*, focuses on providing the information that will allow ESL instructors to resist the misinformation surrounding language teaching and learning in general, and English language teaching in particular. The book itself is divided into a series of chapters focusing on macro-myths about language including myths about first language acquisition; myths about second language acquisition; myths about language and society; and myths about language and thinking. Each chapter includes two to five sub-myths which are subsequently explored as individual issues.

How Myths about Language Affect Language is a useful resource for debunking misinformation. It is, furthermore, noteworthy for the participatory and reflective activities and additional resources included in each chapter. For example, one such activity asks teachers to video tape their class and have the classes analyze the tape for differences in dialect and their perceptions of persons speaking those dialects. Thus, *Myths* moves from passively lecturing readings about language teaching and learning to engage students and

teachers in a hands-on approach in the debunking of the language myths themselves. Moreover, Johnson not only examines the myths as they relate to understanding a language, but also as the myths that relate to the perception of a specific language and as they relate to language teaching and learning. For example, he explores the myth of languages having only one correct form; he analyzes the myths surrounding languages and dialects supposedly being determined by race; and he critiques the notion that the media is corrupting the English language.

How Myths about Language Affect Education also addresses other societal issues such as the notion that by becoming the official language in the U.S.A., English would unify the country. Instead, the author suggests that “language takes care of itself” (p. 80) and that attempts at regulating language or forcing others to speak only one language are forms of racial or ethnic oppression. This is an important idea to understand especially for individuals responsible for developing policies and procedures related to learning English as a second language in institutional settings.

Another interesting feature of this book is its examination of the myths related to both first language acquisition as well as second language acquisition. As Johnson points out “No one teaches a first language... Language acquisition happens and is not taught by parents” (p. 38). The debunking of these myths is extremely important to understanding the process of language acquisition for ESL/EFL instructors. It is also critical to simply understand what these myths are. Many times these myths have been heard so often they appear as facts, difficult to question. Teachers especially need to understand what they themselves and many parents and fellow instructors may or may not believe when it comes to language acquisition. For these and other reasons, this book is a valuable and research-based starting point for discussions concerning language teaching and learning.

In sum, Johnson collects a variety of about English and English language teaching and learning to create a quick and easy-to-read resource for ESL educators and administrators. I only regret that *Myths* does not consider how the myths about other languages might be debunked—or how similar myths function in non-U.S. educational settings. That is to say, the activities, resources, and implications all assume the reader is an ESL/EFL instructor. However, including examples of non-English speaking contexts might give this book an even wider appeal.

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