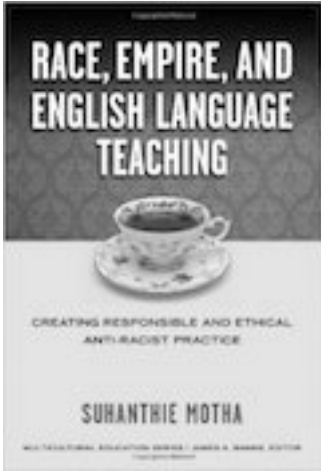


Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching: Creating Responsible and Ethical Anti-Racist Practice

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| Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching: Creating Responsible and Ethical Anti-Racist Practice | | |
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| Author: | Suhanthie Motha (2014) | |
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By asking, “What responsibility do we as TESOL professionals have for noticing and addressing the workings of race, empire, and language ideologies in our practice?” (p. 148), Motha (2014) requested that TESOL professionals go beyond the standard methodologies and practices, and explore ethical aspects of their profession in order to avoid marginalization of language learners. Written for pre-service and practicing TESOL professionals, this text is a discussion of the ways race, power, and language are interrelated, challenging the members of our profession to meaningfully explore the historical context of English language education. Motha explained that when teachers “are adequately prepared to examine their worlds critically, they are in a better position to advocate for their students and to teach their students to advocate for themselves” (p. 133). This work is a guide for educators to carefully consider the power dynamics inherent in English education due to historical factors like colonialism and modern economic requirements. It does not pretend to have the answers; rather it seeks to engage professionals in an in-depth exploration in order to question preconceived notions.

Prompted by her own desire for more meaningful understandings, Motha embarked on a study of four first year educators in an attempt to better understand their conceptualizations and perspectives on the field. She provided detailed information regarding the collection of data and her role in the process, dedicating an entire appendix to detailing the framework of the study. This openness is not only a model for qualitative research, but builds trustworthiness in the reader. The first two chapters include a macro level discussion of the interplay between race, power, and English in order to set the stage for chapters three through five, which explore the macro level concepts in play in the micro level study she conducted. In an age where teachers' perspectives and knowledge are often denigrated, this work privileged them "above the analysis of other observers, researchers, or administrators" (p. 11) in an attempt to explore real world connections to these larger issues. The use of the teachers' voices makes this text relatable to teachers, easily setting the stage for scenarios we have all encountered, and at the same time connecting them with years of historical context and research in order to better prepare us for expectations of social justice for our students in future settings. Motha continued to connect with readers by sharing stories of her own best intentions, recognizing that few, if any, are in this field to do harm, but that these best intentions, such as the often touted belief of "color blindness" of our students, can often be damaging in ways that are unrecognized until further examined. The final chapter sought to answer how teachers' practice might "be shaped by their deep understanding of the complex racialized and postcolonial terrain of English language teaching" (p. 24), concluding with goal and ambitions for the profession to move towards a provincialized English where we support language learners, and other educators, in developing agency. Motha's work weaves together fundamental understandings needed by educators, particularly in the TESOL field.

Motha argued throughout the work that there is no easy answer or solution, but that this work was "a guide for thinking knowledgeably and judiciously through the individual particularities of your practice and making well-informed, agentive decisions about your students and your own personal and professional identities in thoughtful ways" (p. 3). While we spend vast amounts of time in teacher education preparing teachers in methodologies and assessments, this work brings us back to the essential aspect of social justice, asking who has the right to a quality education. If the answer is all students, then we need to go beyond methods and assessments in order to recognize the distinct role of English education in empowering and disempowering our students.

At times the vast research and theories presented by the author are overwhelming, a particular concern for using this text with pre-service teachers. However, the overarching themes are of such importance, teacher educators are encouraged to still use this text in order to have meaningful discussions about race, power, and language education to better prepare their teacher candidates. I recommend working with teacher candidates to develop professional learning communities in their teacher education programs or courses to model their use in future settings and to allow them to explore with their colleagues important texts such as this. Motha provided reflective questions at the end of each chapter to help educators explore their own preconceived notions. These questions might serve as a starting point for meaningful discussions, but

as Motha cautions, many of the questions address sensitive topics, so teacher candidates and teachers and should never be required to submit.

Motha's work is a well-researched, thoughtful, and challenging discussion of race, power, and language through their connections to history and current practice in the field of education, designed "to help teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to teach English to students from diverse cultures and language groups in ways that honor-rather than denigrate- their first languages and cultures" (p. xi). This work provides a relatable and thoughtful commentary on aspects of the profession that are continuously at play, but often overlooked. In developing agency in teachers and teacher candidates, we better prepare the field to develop agency in language learners, shifting the power to learners.

Reviewed by

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