

REVIEWS

Books and other publications

Vanessa Andreotti de Oliveira, *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* (hbk), New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 978-0-230-11161-5, 2011, 304 pages.

As I scanned the poster showing important events at the recent AERA conference held in Vancouver, British Columbia, I was stunned and energized to learn that Vanessa Andreotti de Oliveira was presenting on a Presidential panel; Vanessa served as our Program Chair for the Postcolonial Studies in Education SIG for the conference and is now serving as Chair. At the beginning of her talk, she engaged us to participate with her by visualizing rows of corn in front of us. I closed my eyes and could clearly see the stack of milky yellow ears I had shucked the week before at my feet. She directed us to look at *her* picture of corn, a earthen rainbow of colors neatly arranged on a striped blanket, also the cover of her book. Vanessa had gently and deftly shown how the dominant culture colonizes the mind and how much recognizing the value of indigenous epistemology and provoking productive tension is part of postcolonial curriculum processes; she got me.

Vanessa Andreotti de Oliveira's book (2011), *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*, facilitates understanding sources of postcolonial theory and through a tool called Colonial Discourse Analysis leads readers to critique global development education and practice local participation to enact emergent social possibilities. Via her Introduction, Vanessa offers a proposition that is central to our journey ahead about the benefits and limitation of knowledge: "Therefore, as every knowledge is based on ontological and metaphysical choices that foreclose other choices, every knowledge is also an

ignorance of other knowledges produced in other contexts,” (p. 6). To contemplate, understand and act upon this challenge, Vanessa describes Edward Said's (1978) contribution to postcolonial cultural critique and discusses how social theory facilitates educational research to strengthen the healing inclusion offered in her vision of postcolonial teaching and learning. I was struck by the growing glossary of terms that challenged and stimulated me such as the process of epistemic violence and arrogance built upon the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) that typifies the impact of colonial education, and dissensus, the state of reaching productive tension in learning that I began to see in informal conversational dialogues, called *charlas*, that my partners and I created in Chicago workers centers.

Part 1: Postcolonialisms and Postcolonial Theories presents Vanessa's exploration and relation to the perspectives of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. She begins by describing the usefulness of Bhabha's views on the cultural processes of hybridity, provisional expressions of identity and generative ambiguity. Spivak's ideas related to linkages of desire, representation, and non-coercive ethical relations Vanessa offers as central to the struggles of explaining and acting on the complex global environment through postcolonial praxis. While I have read and resisted both Bhabha and Spivak through questions raised with colleagues and reviewers, I found that Vanessa's interest in both theorists shows her authentic commitment to postcolonial practice and she facilitated my understanding of their potent ideas related to my own postcolonial practice with adult immigrant workers. Vanessa's discussion of Comparative Framework: Selected Theories of Institutional Suffering provided an elegant review of major strands of intellectual arguments challenging colonialism through the multidisciplinary lenses of decolonial analysis, indigenous studies, and critical race theory. I appreciated how

Vanessa expanded and deepened my awareness in these areas which provided me inspiration for further interpretive exploration particularly indigenous elemental expression.

Colonial Discourse Analysis (CDA) is presented as a tool of for critique, challenge and engagement in Part 2: Actioning Postcolonial Theory in Educational Research. Vanessa describes the powerful role of language and agency in curriculum as simultaneously means to perpetuate colonial power relations and to create subjectivities striving to enact social justice globally. In grounding educational research she states: “The criteria for validity is related to the potential effects of the research outcomes in changing patterns of production of meaning that sustain unequal relations of power,” (p. 88). Vanessa leads readers in Analysis of Practice by reflecting the spirit of another CDA-critical discourse analysis, to carefully examine and critique the direction, intentions and implications of model European and United Kingdom curriculum projects aimed at addressing global inequities. The Make Poverty History (MPH) program is shown through Vanessa's critique in Chapter 10: Analysis of Practice III: The Other Who Desperately Needs Our Leadership, to hijack the promise of social marketing by presenting the hook of celebrity attention to young people in the UK to encourage collective behavior that could unreflectively benefit global poor but most certainly increases the political power of specific national actors. Questioning and self-reflection on the part of at least one young person who participated in the program was not encouraged by MPH as Vanessa documents.

As I read, I was longing for more practical and local expressions of how postcolonial approaches could offer processes to support critical pedagogy and participatory research. Vanessa highlighted curriculum inquiry with a goal of enacting postcolonial curriculum processes such as a teacher education online study program, described in Chapter

13: Engaging with Other Knowledge Systems: The Through Other Eyes (TOE) Initiative, what showed learning activity metaphors such as the silhouette of identify construction and the relational hand; these images and practices fit with Spivak's notions that are summarized by the goals "...learning to unlearn, learning to listen, learning to learn and learning to reach out" (p. 227). Moving from the macro world of planetary theory to the micro challenges of raising her son and daughter in partnership with educational systems in diverse states of transition as in England, New Zealand and Finland, Vanessa shows how the personal, for her, required engagement, response, and became political.

In conclusion, Vanessa does not provide answers but offers a closing metaphor related to possibilities for action that require our consideration, reflection and response. For me, Vanessa's book deserves the AERA Division B Book Award in Curriculum Studies-2012, since she addresses and organizes valuable postcolonial theory and approaches to language and discourse with clarity and practicality. Vanessa presents the need for engagement with multiple theories in dynamic tension, not aiming toward consensus, but allowing the emergence of responses and praxis that meet the specific, unique and complex needs of educational participants, that Theodora Lightfoot (2006) always encouraged me to see. Reading Vanessa's work has given me powerful insights into understanding the role of critique, rationales for action and root metaphors reflected in voice for my own educational partnerships with immigrant workers (Bakhtin, 1981).

Vanessa's courageous explorations presented me inspiration about links between Spivak and Foucault (1980) related to desire and power/knowledge in creating and critiquing curriculum. Relational processes of knowledge creation reflect Peter Mayo's (1999) descriptions of democratic relations in adult education, support Irma Olmedo's (2010)

views on border blending, and encourage me to further explore the postcolonial conditions of funds of knowledge with legs sustained by global immigrants in Chicago workers centers (González and Moll, 2002). Through *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* I have more support for Gramsci's (1996) vision of praxis, that participant power results from engagement, dialogue and ideas in action. I trust that Vanessa will embrace and support us as we use her ideas in postcolonial educational research and we will be sustained in our struggles by the many insights she shares.

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