



Revealing the Invisible: Confronting Passive Racism in Teacher Education

By Sherry Marx; Routledge (2006)

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I was knee-deep in my doctoral studies when I first began to identify and confront my own racism. Worse still, my courses in women's studies and queer theory made my life a living nightmare as I was forced to re-examine everything that I held as 'true' and 'normal' in the world. Through the readings of Foucault, Collins, Lorde, McIntosh, Butler, Sedgwick, and Davis I learned of the "isms" (racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, classism) that surrounded me and the interconnectivity of identities. I truly believe that without those educational experiences, I would have continued perpetuating bias and prejudice in my own classrooms.

The topic of racism in teacher education is front and center in Sherry Marx's award winning book, "Revealing the Invisible: Confronting Passive Racism in Teacher Education." Drawn from her award-winning 2001 dissertation "Turning a Blind Eye to Racism No More: Naming Whiteness and Racism with Pre-Service Teachers Working with English Language Learners of Color," Marx introduces nine White female students enrolled in a teacher education program. These pre-service teachers were students in Marx's "Second Language Acquisition" course and agreed to participate in her study while they served as tutors at various public schools in the local area. The tutoring work was the first experience that many "had working with children whose linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds were different from their own." Marx relied on interviews, field observations, and journal entries of these students to expose their racism and to gradually develop language and strategies to confront their racism.

Throughout six chapters Marx interweaves theory and research with the students' own words. Each chapter includes sub-sections that help to organize definitions and concepts that are used to explore race and racism: Whiteness (invisibility and neutrality), backlash, negative White identity, deficits, etc. Perhaps the most compelling aspects of the book are the students' candid remarks which reveal their racism. Perhaps similar to most students their age the women in Marx's study consistently deny their racism, are unaware of their White privilege, and behave in racially biased ways. Through her "intervention" efforts in Chapter Four Marx challenges the women to "see" their racism and explore how they might take responsibility for their racist thoughts and actions.

Chapter Six may be the most relevant for faculty in teacher education programs. Based on her research Marx outlines 11 recommendations that "might foster more discussion of racism and White positionality among White teacher education students in their teacher preparation experience." Some of the recommendations involve creating a trusting classroom environment within which racism may be openly discussed, infusing multicultural education throughout the curriculum, and improving the field placement process and experience. Marx also suggests some resources that may be used to assist faculty with creating a dialogue about racism in their classrooms. Although she refers to these as "small-scale" recommendations, they do have the potential to transform the educational experiences for pre-service teachers.

Marx has two objectives for the book: "Its first objective is to better understand how Whiteness and passive racism influence the ways that White educators make sense of children of color, particular children who are learning English as a second language. The second objective is to challenge these negative

influences by confronting the beliefs of educators with the intention of changing them.” For the most part Marx is successful in meeting these objectives. She provides a thorough and, at times, chilling analysis of how the women exhibit their racism and she offers a technique to gently confront racist beliefs and actions. She also underscores the necessity to design curriculum and purposeful field experiences that include discussions on racism and self-reflection. However, I believe that the book perpetuates the notion that the definition of multiculturalism and diversity includes only race and language. Our classrooms are incredibly diverse with students struggling with a myriad of personal and social issues. While Marx illuminates many aspects involving racism in teacher education we would be remiss to not include class, sexuality, gender, dis/ability, religion, etc. in any discourse on diversity. One cannot “pull out” and isolate race from his/her identity. Therefore, it is important that pre-service teachers understand multiple forms of oppression and how lives are framed as a result of interacting social forces.

While this text may be viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory which recognizes race as the primary factor in discrimination, I believe that this (by itself) may be problematic as it offers only a very specific analysis of bias practices in education. That is why I, as a faculty member, would use this book as a supplemental text in a multicultural class or in a class that is solely focused on race and ethnicity. Students reading about how other people similar in age struggle with their own racism may go a long way towards preparing future teachers to manage racially diverse classrooms.