



2012

A Pedagogical and Postcolonial Response to Antonia Darder's and Ward Churchill's Talks

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Miyazawa, Kaoru. "A Pedagogical and Postcolonial Response to Antonia Darder's and Ward Churchill's Talks." *A Decolonizing Encounter: Ward Churchill and Antonia Darder in Dialogue (Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education)*. Ed. Pierre W. Orelus. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012. 160-161.

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A Pedagogical and Postcolonial Response to Antonia Darder's and Ward Churchill's Talks

Abstract

This is a response to Ward Churchill and Antonia Darder's keynote speeches at the Post-Colonial Special Interest Group's reception at the 2011 annual meeting of the American Education Research Association Conference in New Orleans.

Disciplines

Education

First Testimony

A Pedagogical and Postcolonial Response to Antonia Darder's and Ward Churchill's Talks

By Dr. Kaoru Miyazawa

In a world where the force of marketization permeates every aspect of our lives, academia has also gone through unavoidable transformation. As the language of productivity and competition engulfs the academia, the meaning of education and scholarship has undergone redefinition. Increasingly, teaching has come to mean a provision of "educational" services, and scholarship has been reduced to the act of "production" of knowledge that can be recorded, counted, and replicated. In such a world, we are not surprised to hear that the primary concerns of scholars today are likability and effective production of measurable knowledge. The traditional role that scholars played as public intellectuals, i.e., representing the public and continuously asking critical questions to engage them in the discourse of democracy, equity, and humanity, has lost its significance.

The nature of language spoken in academia mirrors this reality; words are gradually detached from the world. In classrooms and conference rooms, words seem to float and meaninglessly chase one after another. Despite the abundance of words, scarcely do we hear the voices of intellectuals and words that are grounded in one's compassion for humankind and commitment to seek and share the truths. Thus, hearing the words from Antonia Darder and Ward Churchill at the AERA conference was an astonishing experience. They are two of the invaluable and rare intellectuals today who continue to assume their noble obligations of intellectuals with integrity. They spoke the truths from their heart. Even though doing so was to create tension and discomfort in the public as well as to risk their positions, they continued to speak the truth.

The sincerity and intellect carried out through their language brought the audience together, creating a space of care in which common concerns for the public and desire to pursue the common good were central. In addition to creating the public space of care, Darder and Churchill also carried another essential task as intellectuals: they clearly articulated the gap between the reality and illusory views of our society. Their sincere but straightforward words guided us to see the world with clear lenses. Churchill reminded us that, contrary to our common belief, colonialism is a history, and that it has never ceased in our society. What is a seemingly invisible line that separates the colonizer from the colonized has been present at all times, and such a boundary

is reinforced through our everyday interactions with others, even at the very site where the conference was taking place.

Eurocentricity, which is the undercurrent in colonial power, continues to construct "the colonized" subjects as childlike, happy but ignorant, having allowed themselves to be subjugated by the order of existing empire. Darder's poetry affirmed this fact and also reminded us that our struggle in a colonial world, as women of color, will never cease. Even if we rigorously demonstrate our conformity to the existing world order as "model minorities," we cannot escape from the colonial force that pathologizes us and reminds us of our deficit status as women of color. The awareness of these realities, which I probably had known unconsciously, brought about mixtures of feelings, such as anger, grief, and disappointment, to my consciousness.

However, at the same time, the awareness also gave me courage to see and accept the reality, courage to reach out to people beyond social and disciplinary boundaries, courage to speak the truth from my heart, and courage to face the consequence of speaking the truth. At a time when an emphasis on individualism takes over our desire for alliance, and the power of expanding markets presents an overly illusory image of the present, my encounter with these two dissident intellectuals was awakening and a precious experience.

Second Testimony

Speaking the Truth

By Dr. Binaya Subedi

Those of us who are situated in Western academic institutions often find ourselves asking how to enact everyday responsibilities for the purpose of radical social change. The question of responsibility is clearly necessary but not necessarily easy to maneuver, considering that most of us work in institutions that are resistant to marginalized knowledge, particularly non-white epistemologies. The kinds of implicit and explicit commitments universities make towards teaching of selective epistemologies often leave out those who have been historically disenfranchised and deemed as unworthy to be given intellectual space in curriculum.

Both Ward Churchill's and Antonia Darder's scholarly and activist work enables us to understand the ways in which universities function, the specific positions we inhabit, and how social change is urgently needed. I ran across both of the authors' work first in graduate school and also later working in academia. I have learned greatly from Professor Churchill's scholarship in regards to