

Earick, Mary E. (2009) *Racially Equitable Teaching: Beyond The Whiteness of Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators*. NY: Peter Lang.

Pp. 192      ISBN 978-1433101144

Reviewed by Cinthya M. Saavedra  
Utah State University

October 23, 2009

As an early childhood educator situated in the margins of both theoretical and racial-ethnic identity, I am always looking for critical work that moves beyond traditional notions of what counts as early childhood education and research which usually has meant apolitical and ahistorical nature of the following: learning theories, in service and pre-service teacher education, professional development and evidence based best practices, just to name a few (Cannella, 1997; Soto, 2000). Mary E. Earick's *Racially Equitable Teaching: Beyond The Whiteness of Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators* (2009) is an example of such and much-awaited critical work. This kind of work needs to be in our teacher education early childhood classes and professional development in schools.

Without apology Earick, confronts head on the omnipresence of White supremacist ideology and hegemony in early childhood education professional development (ECEPD). Using critical race theory (CRT) as her framework, she embarks on an examination and

#### About the Author

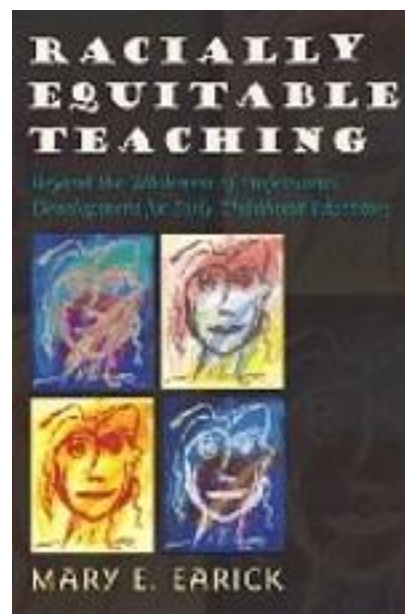
Mary E. Earick received her Ph.D. in language, literacy, and sociocultural studies from the University of New Mexico. Currently she is Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of South Carolina.



Citation: Agathon, Kate. (2009 September 19). Review of *Personal-Passionate-Participatory Inquiry into Social Justice in Education* by Ming Fang He & JoAnn Phillion. *Education Review*, 12. Retrieved [Date] from <http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev842.pdf>

problematization of the current state of ECEPD. Earick takes to task its color-blind, pseudo multicultural and out-right racist underpinnings. Furthermore, she offers practical ways for early childhood educators and teachers to address this brand of White hegemonic and disciplinary power that dominates ECEPD. Her discussion is powerful and as such requires that we deeply engage with the ideas presented. At the same time, we need to enter into a critical dialogue with this text so that we may develop more critical awareness beyond her scope and analysis in order to continue to address larger issues the loom over the field of early childhood education (Burman, 2008a; Cannella, 1997; Soto, 2000).

The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter addresses her positionality and experiences as well as her rationale for introducing and adopting a method and perspective she calls racially equitable teaching (RET) to counter White ideology and hegemony. Chapter 2 is the theoretical framework that grounds her analysis of ECEPD. In Chapter 3, she highlights different ECEPD training and their ties to White ideology and hegemony. Chapter 4 presents us with her response to racist ECEPD by her concept of RET which builds on the work of multicultural and antiracist education, CRT and Whiteness studies. She ends her book in Chapter 5, with anecdotal examples of an anti-White supremacist professional development project called Early Childhood Racial Identity (ECRIE).



### **Positionality and Critical Race Theory in Early Childhood Education**

In Chapter 1, Earick provides her rationale and experiences as a teacher and educator, which led her to question her racial isolation and ideology. She recounts her education as a sea of White students and White professors. Her experiences are not unique to the time she recounts but also have a dangerous permanence even as our public schools are becoming ever more diverse. Earick came to recognize her own white privilege while in the military stationed in Europe. She documents how the local residents regarded People of Color as “unintelligent and undesirable” (p. 2). Friends of Color from her unit began to express how these sentiments were common all over the world. It was here that Earick began to question and contemplate how “racial isolation is not only a U.S phenomenon, but also a global

one” (p. 2). Earick then reflects on her experiences teaching in different places across the United States. As a kindergarten teacher in Connecticut, she reaffirmed that which she had witnessed as a substitute teacher. This time, however, her experiences with inequality came from positions of power like her principal who would instruct her to ‘run a tight ship.’ However, she noted, that the management of the ship was different for White students. Besides different discipline and behavior advice towards students of Color, Earick also was instructed to deliver different teaching methods. For White students, chatting and movement as well as questioning and seeking alternative answers were allowed in and out of the classroom. For Earick it was these types of unequal atmosphere experienced by Whites and students of Color that perpetuate racialized and unequal pedagogies. She writes, “...the methods applied in the predominately White, high-performing schools overtly perpetuate racialized differentiations through the pedagogies applied by early childhood teachers in our district” (p. 3). This realization prompted her to take the local to the global. That is, examine the larger racial issues that impact local communities and smaller institutions such as early childhood education.

Chapter 2 is such an examination. Earick provides the theory that influenced her investigation into the structural conditions that facilitate and perpetuate racist pedagogies and White supremacist ideologies and hegemony. She finds refuge in critical race theory (CRT). CRT as Earick explains it, is an examination of the “permanence of racism” and the “racial reality” of our every day lives. Inevitably then racism seeps into the world of early childhood education through hegemonic discourses that creates a commonsensical way to view the way to experience schooling in early childhood. Earick writes,

I use critical race theory lens because the racial reality of early childhood students is one of indoctrination that spreads into notions of a meritocracy through a racialized teacher work force and an educational testing system that privileges Whites over all other peoples (p. 14).

This type of analysis is needed in a field that tends to ignore the hegemonic discourses that influence and have real consequences for our children, workforce, families and communities (Soto, 2000). Early childhood education’s commitment to developmental psychology and science is a major factor that impedes sociocultural, political and historical

complexities such as racism as well as the other isms to surface. In fact, scientifically based research becomes another venue for hegemonic discourses to construct and perpetuate racist, imperialistic and colonialist ideologies (Burman, 2008b; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Scheurich, 2002; Smith, 1999).

### **Professional Development as White Supremacist Ideology and Hegemony**

In Chapter 3, Earick develops a reading of ECPD that unmasks the strong tendencies of White ideology that translate into making Whiteness a hidden norm, a natural and inevitable truth that many including people of color willingly accept and uphold. In her analysis of various types of professional development models, she aptly teases apart how these models instill and further advance White supremacist ideology and hegemony. She discusses and examines the types of professional development that are inherently tied to White supremacist ideologies.

Of special interest is the unique discussion of neoconservative ideology and its ties to constructivist learning theory. This is an excellent example of how all discourses, in this case constructivism, are potentially dangerous. We must be vigilant and critical even of those we feel most comfortable to us as educators. After all, who would not want to implement constructivist ideas in their classroom especially as it is linked to democracy and equality? But as Earick states, constructivist learning theory “stress universalism, individualism and independence as a route to success...” (p. 51). She argues that inquiry-based learning, the heart of constructivism, rarely requires students to think critically. In fact, she observed many instances where constructivist type activities were drawn from the teacher’s privilege positions. Earick offers an example of one teacher who privileged his own White middle-class experiences and that of his White middle-class students. In this example, something as benign as grocery shopping is embedded within racial and class dynamics and asymmetrical power relations that require examination with children. However, as Earick noticed, teachers rarely questioned issues of equity and democracy when devising constructivist activities for students. The construction and privileging of knowledge from a White middle-class experience is upheld over students of color experiences and knowledge of their contexts. According to Earick, this is exactly

how White ideology and hegemony is perpetuated through color-blind teaching.

### **Transformative Pedagogies and Critical Action Research**

Earick concludes her book with examples of how early childhood teachers can transform their White hegemonic practices with professional development that counters White supremacist ideology and hegemony. For Earick, it is about teachers shedding the color-blind ideology that is prevalent in our society and seeing themselves as racial beings as a first step. Earick's ECRIE project as detailed in the book focused on engaging with teachers and fostering an honest and open dialogue about race. Once these dialogues occur then action research is needed on the teachers' part. Earick writes, "...critical action research is a systematic form of ideological self-reflective inquiry by participants, with the specific intention of increasing their understanding of how they manifest their hegemonic ideologies in their classrooms" (p. 104). This is especially important because it moves the discussions about race and racism to the level of practice and perhaps even praxis (Freire, 1970).

### **Continuing the Critical Dialogue: Examining Intersectionalities in Early Childhood**

As much as I know and feel the racial reality that Earick details in her book, I can't help but also feel how equally strong, sexism, heteronormativity and class exploitation are part of the scattered hegemonies (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994) that we confront everyday. For example, as a light skin Latina, who can pass for white any day, I experience a sort of white privilege that goes without saying. However, my white skin does not afford me the same privilege as my white male colleagues. There is something about being a woman in academia and much more in early childhood educator that places many political restraints. I am suspect, unruly, and potentially dangerous to the patriarchal order in academia that subscribes to a particular genre of research, knowledge and truth (Saavedra, 2006).

Furthermore, I often confront the naturalness of the middle-class experience whether they are from U.S. colleagues or colleagues from other countries, especially when it comes to the questions of 'how to raise children.' There is something about

seeing the world through a middle-class lens that is normalized and hegemonic as well. We cannot forget that heteronormative assumptions are strong in early childhood and are discourses that are normalized in almost every aspect of the work of early childhood teachers. Teachers would still have a hard time reading books to children that offer a different family make-up that does not consist of the sanctioned ones: mom and dad.

Lastly, we cannot forget that patriarchy was one of the founding ideologies of early childhood education (Cannella, 1997; Grumet, 1988). From theories of development to theories of teaching and learning, men, backed by scientific thought, have dominated the language and thus have labeled what is good, appropriate and true for early childhood education (Burman, 1998; Cannella, 1997). These need to be acknowledged in any critical examination of early childhood education. To not recognize this is also to normalize a masculine version and invention of what it means to be a teacher and child as well as what it means to participate in school.

Ignoring racial realities is not the only challenge that teachers face. Part of the problem is also how teaching has been conceived a “woman’s work” and how teachers along with children are disciplined and inevitably placed within a hierarchical structures (Acker, 1994, 1999; Apple, 1986). The intersectionalities of race, gender, class exploitation and heteronormativity need to be examined and carefully addressed in early childhood education, research and practice.

## References

- Acker, S. (1994). *Gendered education: Sociological reflections on women, teaching and feminism*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Acker, S. (1999). *The realities of teachers' work: Never a dull moment*. London: Cassell.
- Apple, M. (1986). *Teachers and texts: A political economy of class and gender relations in education*. New York: Routledge.
- Burman, E. (2008a). *Deconstructing Developmental psychology (2nd ed)*. London: Routledge.
- Burman, E. (2008b). *Developments: Child, Image, Nation*. London: Routledge.
- Cannella, G. S. (1997). *Deconstructing early childhood education: social justice and revolution*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Cannella, G. S. and Viruru, R. (2004). *Childhood and postcolonization: Power, education, and contemporary practice*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Myra Ramos Bergman, Trans. New York: Continuum.
- Grewal, I., & Kaplan, C. (Eds.). (1994). *Scattered hegemonies*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grumet, M. (1988). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Saavedra, C. M. (2006). *The teacher's body: Discourse, power and discipline in the history of the feminization of teaching*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station.
- Scheurich, J.J. (2002). *Anti-racist scholarship: An advocacy*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Soto, L. D. (2000) (Ed). *The politics of early childhood education*. NY: Peter Lang.

## About the Reviewer

**Cinthya M. Saavedra** is an assistant professor at Utah State University and teaches courses on bilingual/ESL/multicultural education. She is a former bilingual/ESL pre-kindergarten and third grade teacher in Texas. Her research interests include Chicana/Latina/ Transnational feminist and poststructural examinations of immigrant early childhood and teacher education.



Copyright is retained by the first or sole author,  
who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*.

<http://edrev.asu.edu>



### Editors

Gene V Glass  
Gustavo Fischman  
Melissa Cast-Brede