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Gabriel, Rachael & Lester, Jessica Nina. (Eds.) (2013). *Performances of Research: Critical Issues in K-12 Education*. NY: Peter Lang.

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Performances of Research is part of the series: *Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education*. The series addresses—in several venues—social justice, diversity, and equality in education as critical components essential for healthy growth. The book's introduction "sets the stage" by providing the background rationale, organization of the book, and how to use the text to its best possible advantages. In its nine chapters, each by different authors, a wide spectrum of educational and sociocultural issues is artfully presented through dialogue and introspective exercises.

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"The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (*Hamlet*, 2.2). Shakespeare's Hamlet's classic soliloquy alludes to Hamlet staging a play for the purpose of eliciting guilt from the intended audience member (Claudius). Likewise the vignettes through the nine chapters are intended to elicit feelings that will hopefully leading to a psychological reconfiguration of perceptions. If one were to casually go through the pages of *Performances of Research*, one could surmise that the contents are more consistent with vignettes with sociologically relevant dialogues and less with research. In actuality, findings (and participant responses) from qualitative research provide the dialogue. The Editors note: "The primary purpose of the book is to invite readers to engage with alternative representations of those institutionalized practices that generate and sustain educational inequities" (p. 1). Simply put, the reader is invited to examine by participation the biases, misconstrued impressions, and moral ineptitudes present in educational systems.

Users of this book will be primarily educators, advocates, and other professionals who work with diverse populations of students and young adults either with deficits or who otherwise do not "fit the mold" of average students. Likewise, the audiences for the vignettes are new or seasoned educators and others entrusted in furthering the growth of the young. The first three chapters examine student labeling, feelings, and predetermined responses from educators.

In Chapter one, *I am Proud to be African: Countering Deficit Discourses in a U.S. School,* the Author (Sprecher) states that being a *refugee* is construed as pathology in need of "fixing." "This performance ethnography critically examines the matriculation of Burundian children with refugee status in a predominately white public school in the southeastern United States" (p.7). The vignette presented is based on research yet contains ethno-dramatic material to augment the message of healthy diversity and identity. The Author emphasizes that the performance is a "learning tool" more than a way of entertaining an audience; theatricality with a serious purpose rather than as a passive entertainment vehicle.

Chapter two continues the diversity theme: *I live in a Curled World…:Stories from Immigrant Students and Their Teachers* (Okhremtchouk & Jimenez). The authors attempt to attack preconceived notions regarding English language learners through performance ethnography and audience's active participation. Writing of performative texts for dialogue is based closely on actual research participant's statements. After the three-act presentation, the reader is invited to respond to five questions regarding dialogue. The questions are scripted to elicit more than cognitive processing; they instruct readers to relate characters' feelings to their own lives. The Authors are effective in their presentation. The following chapter offers a different approach to the problem of labeling.

Chapter three's performative script is presented in a humorous fashion but borders on the sarcastic. The message, therefore, may be lost due to the Authors' attempts at cleverness in players' names (e.g., Professor Used-to-Teach) and sardonic dialogue. Lester and Gabriel in *The Naming of the Dis/abled Within U.S. Special Education,* attempt to render their message by utilizing the practices of the "theatre of the absurd" (p. 73). Their original intent was to examine and portray the ways "stakeholders" experience a typical special education meeting; however, the vignette is far from typical.

Chapter four continues the theme of labeling and testing of school children. The Authors (McGill-Franzen & Moran) successfully explain and portray the strong influence of language in the presentation and administration of examinations in *Needing Intensive Remediation: How a Reading Identity is Negotiated, Interpreted, and Lived*. Through dialogue, the Authors depict tester's incorrect assumptions that the language of a test means the same to both tester and student. Likewise, another assumption is that the context of a test is controlled and standardized—therefore equal for all students (p. 94).

Effective test administration and valid results require effective "co-construction" between tester and student; to establish that words mean the same to both parties, and that context is understood by the student. The Authors refer to the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (*DIBELS*) test when they note assumptions and dialogue embedded in a testing scenario may "exacerbate

inequality for some students who may not fit 'nicely' into the seemingly constrained mold required to perform adequately in particular testing situations" (p. 119). The Authors hope to expand the dialogue among professionals in presenting a more meaningful test administration. Chapters five and six depart from testing and remediation concerns.

Perhaps the biggest focus today in public education is school discipline. With the proliferation of "politically correct" and zero-tolerance policies, increases in school suspensions are common. This is evident, for example, with children being suspended for any behavior or drawings depicting firearms (i.e., a school district banning imaginary guns). In Chapter five, *Doing Time in ISS: A Performance of School Discipline* (Evans) is concerned with in-school suspensions (ISS) as a punitive and exclusionary alternative to out-of-school suspensions. The theoretical framework of social constructionism provides insight into the forming and agreement of contextual definitions in a school setting. Unstructured interviews of 13 middle school students provide the base for performance dialogue. The thematic structure derived from data analysis reveals interesting information regarding ISS students' experiences.

Whereas Chapter five is concerned with ISS, Chapter six is concerned with the lives of 18- to 24-year-olds in prison: *Education is a Small Part of My Life I Have to Live* (Anders, Khalfani & Swain). Two Authors (Anders and Swain) verbalize their being white and female, and question their own racism's possible influence in research. For dialogue purposes, nine prisoners' in-depth interviews were chosen. The Authors admit to dramatizing the script for maximum effect; however, such actions are consistent with performativity and should not detract from the message. The reader should pay particular attention to the nature of the dialogue—the roles that families and school experiences play in the prisoners' lives. Readers are encouraged to become actively involved in prison reform and educational change.

Akin to Chapters one and two is Chapter seven which utilizes performance ethnography based on ethnographic case studies. *We Hear What We Know: Racial Messages in a Southern School* (Howard) draws from the Author's

experiences in a predominately Caucasian-based elementary school thought to be "racist." Racial messages given and received by teachers are examined by interesting theoretical frameworks: (a) Critical race theory, (b) Critical [human] geography, and (c) Performance theory. The Author explains well the significance of each perspective and how data were gathered and analyzed to form the basis for the dialogue. "The goal of this script is to give examples of ways in which racial messages are connected to the geographic places in which they are told" (pp. 195-6). The next two chapters depart significantly from this and preceding chapters.

An upcoming area in need of further research is the Early College High School Initiative. In Chapter eight, according to Brooks in *Our School: College-Going Scripts of Students in an Early College High School*, little research is available to gauge the program's success. This recent program focuses on preparing first-generation college students to transition into a postsecondary environment. The Author uses Ethnographic methodology—interviews with a cross section of students and personnel from an early college high school; he created vignettes that phenomenologically reenact lived experiences. Data analysis indicated "participants had shared conflicts, both internal and interpersonal, related to their experiences in an early college high school" (pp. 219, 220). A thematic analysis conducted by the Author reveals seven patterns. The reader is invited to read the dialogue while looking for patterns.

Chapter nine, *Queerer than Queer!* (Vicars), although concerned with sexual orientation, is consistent with diversity and educational inequities in education. The Author maintains that the American educational system is based on "institutional heterosexism"—the belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality (p. 245). He quotes religious texts regarding the topic and he offers a section on definitions and anagrams to assist the educator in understanding homosexuality. Curricula must change to embrace diversity in sexual orientation. Vicars presents a dramatic and effective four-act play presented in the first-person singular.

Except for Chapter three, *Performances of Research* does justice to presenting the tool of participatory performances

in addressing—and hopefully changing—preconceived notions and inequalities in education. While it is true that quantitative research presents empirical evidence and proof for implementing changes, performative dialogue from qualitative studies is most effective in reaching the emotions of participant and audience. It is through examination of feelings that emotionally-based prejudices are confronted by conflicting information and can hasten positive change in the American educational system. This book is recommended for such purposes.

About the Author

Rudolph R. Bustos is a professor for the College of Health Sciences, Trident University. One of his works is *Including Blood Lead Levels of All Immigrant Children When Evaluating for ADHD* (2008). He is also a licensed school psychologist and social worker, and ran groups for children from divorced families at a mental health center. Conference presentations include: Rural Health Care in Multicultural Populations; Jigsawing for Socio-Educational Change: Acculturation and Second Language Acquisition of Hispanic Children in Elementary School, and Pre-Deployment Psychological Briefing Methodology: A Sense of Coherence Model. Current interest includes PTSD—soldiers and their families.

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