

## **Palgrave Macmillan's Postcolonial Studies in Education**

Studies utilising the perspectives of postcolonial theory have become established and increasingly widespread in the last few decades. This series embraces and broadly employs the postcolonial approach. As a site of struggle, education has constituted a key vehicle for the 'colonization of the mind'. The 'post' in postcolonialism is both temporal, in the sense of emphasizing the processes of decolonization, and analytical in the sense of probing and contesting the aftermath of colonialism and the imperialism which succeeded it, utilising materialist and discourse analysis. Postcolonial theory is particularly apt for exploring the implications of educational colonialism, decolonization, experimentation, revisioning, contradiction and ambiguity not only for the former colonies, but also for the former colonial powers. This series views education as an important vehicle for both the inculcation and unlearning of colonial ideologies. It complements the diversity that exists in postcolonial studies of political economy, literature, sociology and the interdisciplinary domain of cultural studies. Education is here being viewed in its broadest contexts, and is not confined to institutionalized learning. The aim of this series is to identify and help establish new areas of educational inquiry in postcolonial studies.

### **Series Editors:**

**Peter Mayo** is Professor and Head of the Department of Education Studies at the University of Malta where he teaches in the areas of Sociology of Education and Adult Continuing Education, as well as in Comparative and International Education and Sociology more generally.

**Anne Hickling-Hudson** is Associate Professor of Education at Australia's Queensland University of Technology (QUT) where she specializes in cross-cultural and international education.

**Antonia Darder** is a Distinguished Professor of Educational Policy Studies and Latino/a Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

### **Editorial Advisory Board**

Carmel Borg (University of Malta)  
John Baldacchino (Teachers College, Columbia University)  
Jennifer Chan (University of British Columbia)  
Christine Fox (University of Wollongong, Australia)  
Zelia Gregoriou (University of Cyprus)  
Leon Tikly (University of Bristol, UK)  
Birgit Brock-Utne (Emeritus, University of Oslo, Norway)

### **Titles:**

*A New Social Contract in a Latin American Education Context*  
Danilo R. Streck; Foreword by Vítor Westhelle

*Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan*  
M. Ayaz Naseem

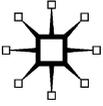
*Critical Race, Feminism, and Education: A Social Justice Model*  
Menah A. E. Pratt-Clarke

*Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*  
Vanessa Andreotti

# Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education

*Vanessa Andreotti*

palgrave  
macmillan



ACTIONABLE POSTCOLONIAL THEORY IN EDUCATION

Copyright © Vanessa Andreotti, 2011.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2011 978-0-230-11161-5

All rights reserved.

First published in 2011 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,  
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,  
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,  
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies  
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,  
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-29388-9

ISBN 978-0-230-33779-4 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230337794

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Andreotti, Vanessa.

Actionable postcolonial theory in education / Vanessa Andreotti.

p. cm.—(Postcolonial studies in education)

1. Education—Philosophy.
2. Education—Methodology.
3. Postcolonialism. I. Title.

LB14.7.A545 2011

370.1—dc22

2011011994

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: October 2011

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*This book is dedicated to my family, in all its manifestations,  
especially to my children: Bruno, Giovanna and Tiago.*

# Contents

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
Introduction	1
<b>Part 1 Postcolonialisms and Postcolonial Theories</b>	
One Contextualizing Postcolonialisms and Postcolonial Theories	13
Two Homi Bhabha's Contribution and Critics	25
Three Gayatri Spivak's Contribution and Critics	37
Four Comparative Framework: Selected Theories of Institutional Suffering	57
<b>Part 2 Actioning Postcolonial Theory in Educational Research</b>	
Five Contextualizing the Research Process	85
Six Analysis of Policy I: Focus on Western Liberal Humanism	97
Seven Analysis of Policy II: Focus on Neoliberalism	119
Eight Analysis of Practice I: The Other Who Validates Our Superiority	135
Nine Analysis of Practice II: The Other Who Should Be Grateful for Our Efforts	149

Ten	Analysis of Practice III: The Other Who Desperately Needs Our Leadership	161
	<b>Part 3 Actioning Postcolonial Pedagogies</b>	
Eleven	Contextualizing Pedagogical Processes and Contexts	175
Twelve	Relativizing Western Knowledge Production in Spaces of Dissensus: The OSDE Methodology	191
Thirteen	Engaging with Other Knowledge Systems: The Through Other Eyes Initiative	217
Fourteen	Wrestling with Meaning and Life: Being a Mother of “Southern” Immigrant Children	241
	(In)Conclusion	261
	<i>Notes</i>	267
	<i>References</i>	271
	<i>Index</i>	285

## Tables and Figures

### Tables

4.1	A pedagogical comparative framework of selected approaches against institutional suffering	59
5.1	Different approaches to multicultural and global justice education	94
6.1	Engagements with ideas, values, beliefs, and traditions of Others	105
12.1	Differences between traditional reading, critical reading, and critical literacy	195
12.2	OSDE suggested procedures	200

### Figures

Figure of Family (Author Photo)	xi	
12.1	Legitimate knowledge constructed in context	196
12.2	Seeing differently	196
12.3	Unpacking knowledge production	197
13.1	Silhouette of identity construction	222
13.2	Relational hand	223
13.3	Trying to help	225
13.4	Coming to know	226
13.5	Trying other shoes	227
13.6	Scales of worth	228
13.7	Enquiry river	229

## Preface



Figure of Family (Author Photo)

Let me start this book with a well-known story: Once upon a time there was a magic ladder that started on earth and finished in the sky. Only worthy human beings could climb the ladder. The ladder was very specific in its definition of who was worthy: one had to believe the sky was the limit for one's knowledge and ingenuity, and that knowledge and knowledge alone could solve all problems and engineer all things, including perfect human beings and a perfect society. Thus, there were only two conditions to climb the ladder: one had to dare

to know and put in the hard work to pull one's body up against gravity. There was one catch as well—gravity changed according to the climber, and this was a defence mechanism of the ladder to make sure that only the best reached the top. If the ladder chose you, your climb was easy, and you were worthy. If it did not, your body felt heavier, you had difficulties breathing, your climb was much slower; it could even make you stop and in that case you would listen to the insults both from the other climbers wanting to pass and from those continuing to climb: give up, you are not worthy of the ladder! But you could also wait for a benevolent climber whose gravity was lighter and who was happy to increase his weight as double proof of his worth. Those who fell from the ladder and those who refused to climb were lost to those who were climbing—they had proved their unworthiness and inhumanity, as only humans could dare to pursue knowledge. Those who could not climb were weak, lazy, and feeble minded. Their lives were based on animal instincts rather than rational thought and that is why they preferred the earth to the sky. They were also perceived as a threat to the climbers and therefore it was necessary to keep them under control at the bottom. However, these systems of control forced those at the bottom to use their bodies to keep the ladder in place as the ladder grew larger and heavier to accommodate more climbers. Those at the bottom were also forced to provide food and resources to worthy climbers and to collect their waste. The infinitely wise magical ladder had given the fast climbers, those who had dared to know, worked hard, and proven their worth, the means to climb and enable the progress and evolution of humanity, while those who failed the test were recruited to work at the bottom to make up for their shameful inability to climb, for their inhumanity—and that is why, those at the bottom should be happy for the opportunity to sacrifice for the collective good: the betterment of humanity.

I was born in a mixed-heritage family in Brazil, where my father, of German ancestry, was a fierce defender of the magical ladder, while my indigenous grandmother had bravely attached herself to the ground and annoyed everyone by stubbornly refusing the opportunities to be lifted up the ladder. My mother's heritage counted as high gravity in my father's books, but trying to be a worthy and capable climber, he took it upon himself to carry her up and produce children who had his genes and therefore would be strong and wise enough to climb by themselves. I was a front-row witness of the relationship established when you allow yourself to be carried up: my mum believed in the ladder too and in the possibility for lesser gravity for her future

generation. My guess is that she did not predict the costs of being carried through. Given their disadvantaged economic backgrounds, my mum and dad's firm grip on the ladder was probably motivated by a deep fear of inadequacy as "capable climbers" or "worthy human beings" that they carried themselves. As I was growing up I was also very confused, trying to understand and survive both a forceful push toward the ladder and the unmarked violence that was made very explicit at any sign of questioning, insubordination, or contemplation of alternative ways. At those times, I was threatened with the fate of my indigenous grandmother who died "with nothing in the middle of nowhere."

This grandmother passed away when I was 8 and she was 84. I had been born and brought up in the city while she lived in the countryside. What I remember of her is that, despite the insistence of all the family for her to live in a "proper" house in the city, she insisted on living in a "tapera"—a very precarious dwelling made of old and cracked wood, with no separate rooms, no floor, and no windows. She had a fire in the middle of the "house" and animals around her. She used to spend her days crouching in front of the fire, cooking, smoking a homemade cigarette, and chanting prayers. There were onions and tobacco hanging from the ceiling and some hay and wood in a corner with blankets on top of it. As an urban child, although I liked my grandmother, I did not like going to her house. At every visit, my mother would try to convince her to come and live with us, in a "proper" urban house where she could be looked after. She would just listen and continue to smoke, to pray, and to look at the fire. Meanwhile, I would sit in a corner wishing to go home: the house smelled of smoke, she smelled of smoke, and I would smell of smoke if I spent too long there. All I could think of was that it would be much better for her to come with us and have a shower every day, so that she could smell nice.

Sometimes, I wish I could turn back time and tell her that I am sorry. I was too young to understand the force of history in what was happening. Sometimes I feel she still connects with me: the blueprint of stories that shaped her aspirations still reach me, she still gives me hope. Sometimes she also speaks through me, especially when I need to stand up for myself and stare at life's fires. She did not have the technology of alphabetic literacy when she was alive, but I would not have been able to write this book without her—what an irony!

Postcolonial theory gave me the gift of a language to talk about my own existence in-between cultures in historical and political

dissonance. In such conditions, the lack of a language can drive one mad, as the burden of difference, of being always “not quite,” is internalized as an individual’s inadequacy, which generates constant guilt. Postcolonial theory gave me the means to reinterpret this inadequacy as a projected violence embedded in historical and political contexts. Once this message was assimilated, my first reaction was relief (I may not be to blame for everything), the second was to look for a culprit (that is when I became really angry at my family), the third was a realization of another irony: we are all victims in this (although material vulnerability is indeed severely unevenly spread). Therefore, if we are to imagine possibilities and relationships “otherwise” we need to unlearn the roots of what created this type of violence in the first place. Postcolonial theory brought the relationship with my family back to my life—if I cannot relate to and love them unconditionally beyond what they say and even what they do, I will leave to my children only the possibility of violence, through my own example. Loving my family (which is not just defined by blood ties) unconditionally does not mean loving the stories they tell (like the story of the ladder), though. Postcolonial theory emphasizes that it is my responsibility, as a family member, to offer my relations an array of possible stories, as well as the means, strength, wisdom, and courage to negotiate between stories and make choices. It is also my job to nurture (first in myself) an ethical awareness that one becomes responsible for the intended and unintended implications of every choice one makes and every relationship one creates.

Beyond the level of cognition, of intellectual engagement, the ideas in this book shaped and are/were (re)shaped by my life and the lives of those around me. As a real gift cannot be paid back, just passed forward, this book is offered as such a gift.

## Acknowledgments

This work is based on a learning journey that is both personal and collective. Therefore I would like to thank all of those who have made it possible: my “tipuna,” parents, children, partners, mentors, friends, and students who not only provided the core motivation of this book, but who also supported me throughout this journey. A special thank you goes to those who have significantly contributed to the development of the projects Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry and Through Other Eyes, coordinated by myself and Lynn Mario T. M. de Souza with the support of Linda Barker: Amosa Fa’aoi, Andrew Robinson, April Biccum, Bob Randall, Bronwyn Thurlow, Chris Moore, Clarissa Jordao, Clive Belgeonne, Dennis Banda, Doug Bourn, Ingrid Hoofd, Jai Sen, Juan Carlos Macchicado, Katy Neil-Jones, Katya Brookes, Laiz Rubinger Chen, Lisa Taylor, Madhuresh Kumar, Maree Grant, Margaret Burr, Matthias Fiedler, Mereana Taki, Noemi Condori, Paul Warwick, Raul Pardinaz-Solis, Rob Bowden, Simon Tormey, Sujatha Raman, Veronica Voiels, Wera Mirin, Yousria Hamed and groups of teachers in Brazil, Peru, England and New Zealand who provided invaluable insights and feedback on the initiatives taken.