Cultivating Critical Language Awareness in TESOL

We Been Off That: Mimicry, Agency and Politics in Critical Language Awareness

Tasha Austin is an assistant professor of teacher education, language education and multilingualism for the University at Buffalo, Graduate School of Education.

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Critical language awareness (CLA) is at the heart of much critical work in education both theoretically and in praxis. The use of CLA typically calls for positioning students as capable of identifying the ways that language naturalizes discriminatory beliefs and practices (and the deleterious effects of said naturalization) as a means of potentially disrupting the societal hierarchies they reinforce. Still, Black and racially minoritized youth often practice CLA prior to entering formalized education spaces, and well beyond its confines. What then, is the potential for instructors to use CLA to increase their own receptive literacy as opposed to positioning themselves as more knowledgeable with regard to identifying and deconstructing racialized hierarchies? For TESOL educators in particular, what value is lost within the learning environment when youth who utilize CLA are framed as non-agentive in their language learning, rather than as language architects (Flores, 2019)? This talk explores the potential of CLA to illuminate the agentive and complex language insights of racially and linguistically minoritized communities in navigating white supremacist worlds within and beyond the classroom. The talk concludes with preliminary findings from an empirical work on the role of CLA in preparing content-area teachers to work with linguistically minoritized youth.

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