**Educated in whiteness: Good intentions and diversity in schools**, by Angelina E. Castagno, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014, 224 pp., US$25 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8166-8165-5 / US$75 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8166-8163-1

In *Educated in Whiteness*, Angelina E. Castagno reveals the damaging effects of an education system that requires those within it to be 'nice' above all else. The central thesis of the text, that current approaches to diversity education in the United States are actually perpetuating the work of whiteness, is successfully developed and supported throughout the book. Ethnographic research conducted by the author in two culturally and socio-economically different high schools within a Utah school district is analysed according to critical race and whiteness theories of education. This text shines a spotlight on those who seek to absolve themselves and their institutions of responsibility for educational inequities by hiding behind good intentions and refusing to consider harmful outcomes of their ill-informed assistance. Castagno concludes that educators', administrators' and policy makers' continued refusal to recognise the impacts of whiteness on the design and implementation of US diversity policies is at the core of their failure to take substantive action towards socially just educational reform.

The introduction provides an outline of the book's structure, including succinct explanations of the text's core concepts. Each chapter focusses on a pair of concepts which are briefly theorised in the introduction: interest convergence and responsibility; colourblindness and powerblindness; silence and politeness; equity and meritocracy; and individualism and liberalism. Each concept is further theorised throughout the chapter and illustrated with examples from ethnographic data collected during Castagno's 2005-2006 research at 'Birch' and 'Spruce' Secondary Schools. One of Castagno's goals is to provide some insight into inequities that remain prevalent in school systems, despite widespread commitment to its elimination. The author achieves this goal masterfully by exposing nice people as the carriers of whiteness, and institutions filled with nice, well-meaning people as unyielding barriers to equity in education.

The author sees her work as contributing to current dialogue around ill-directed education diversity and equity policies in the United States, particular in the context of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) which has reinvigorated conversations about inequity in schools. Castagno maintains that the uniqueness of the sites from which her data are drawn and the "wholly American" political foundations of her context mean that her findings are not generalizable. This is true of any in-depth, small scale ethnography, but the utterances of teachers and administrators at Birch and Spruce, and the devotion to individualism, egalitarianism and meliorism found within the US are certainly reflected in a range of contexts. While Castagno undertook her ethnographic research within two schools in a distinct school district, I expect that readers within any system with a legacy of equal

opportunity and achievement gap discourse will relate to the broad themes and concerns addressed in the book.

Castagno points out that one of the core problems with 'niceness' is that it leads teachers and administrators to rely on their good intentions to overcome issues associate with racism, oppression and power disparities, without having to engage in work that is uncomfortable and challenging. This is illustrated most vividly in the third chapter where the author describes the active role that teachers play in creating dangerous and unsafe sites for students whilst upholding values of politeness, inoffensiveness and niceness. The ethnographic examples provided in this section are particularly striking because the phrases used at Birch and Spruce are standard teacher responses: "Stop talking about race and ethnicity because it's making you upset…I want this to be a nice environment where everyone feels welcomed…other people can hear it and may get offended" (p. 91). These kinds of responses reveal an allegiance to whiteness and silence productive race talk. Another strategy employed by nice teachers is to deny the existence of racism, homophobia and transphobia by ignoring it or by dealing with them as issues of etiquette: "I don't want to hear that word", "You know I don't like that word"… "Be polite", and "Don't use that word" (p. 99). These illustrations provide readers with an insight into the practical application of the more theoretical foundations laid in the previous chapters.

Castagno's examination of whiteness at an institutional level is a challenging and welcome feature that greatly contributes to a field that, ironically, often to focus on the manifestation of whiteness within individuals. While critiques of whiteness and niceness are not new (see, for example, Alemán, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998), their use throughout *Educated in whiteness* contributes to the development of a convincing hypothesis about the future of US schools. Castagno's unique contribution comes in chapter five, where she analyses schools as individuals, rather than as sites of a collection of individuals. This analysis was prompted by Birch Secondary School's receipt of a School Improvement Grant (SIG) to facilitate achievement of NCLB targets. This initiative decontextualises and alienates schools from the broader education system by treating them as individual actors in need of assistance,

> Just as educators once talked about remediating at-risk students, policy makers now talk about remediating at-risk schools. This is important because of the way it lulls us into compassion and empathy for schools. Schools are no longer institutions that we must work to ensure are serving all people equitably. Instead, schools are the individuals that need our care and compassion. (p. 145)

Given the picture painted in the earlier chapters, we can figure out where this type of policy will lead us: nice, empathetic, compassionate solutions for underprivileged schools, diverting attentions away from any suggestion of systemic change and foundational challenge to whiteness. The SIG and other policies that focus on a constructed 'individual' erode community by focussing attention of the achievement or failure of the individual as though they exist in a social vacuum, devoid of external influences. Consequently, there is no impetus to focus on undermining systemic problems of the community because problems are addressed at an individual level, by sacking staff or shutting down schools. Further to this, the liberal culture means that individuals move into defensive positions to preserve their

interests, not those of their students and communities Instead, the latter are seen as the key contributors to school failure, something that matters to teachers once their jobs are at risk.

In the concluding chapter Castagno draws comparisons between punishments doled out to polluters via a superfund trust, and school reform via SIG and similar policies. In both cases, individual culprits are sought and punished but the system that created the problem (and will continue to foster it) is allowed to carry on as usual. Just as widespread pollution isn't curbed when an individual is found guilty of contaminating a local site, nor does racism and inequity end when a principal is fired or a school is shut down. There may be improvements in some outcomes, but these come at the expense of broader, fundamental changes with any hope of bringing about the results well intentioned educators claim they wish to see.

Although the book answers some important questions about education and diversity, Castagno neither promises nor provides easy solutions to the problems identified in the book. This may disappoint or frustrate some readers. It is, however, a feature of the text that should be understood within the framework the author was working within. The works of critical race scholars, particularly those from the racial realist school, describe the dangers of seeking hasty answers before developing an understanding of complex nature of those issues (Bell, 2004; Delgado, 2003). The provision of an explanation for the continuation of whiteness and failure of multicultural initiatives without a set of solutions should be welcomed by educators and academics as an invitation to engage in the difficult work of recognising the current state of education. The point is articulated perfectly by Bell's (1992) quotation in the epigraph of *Educated in whiteness*,

> …real service requires humility. We must first recognize and acknowledge (at least to ourselves) that our actions are not likely to lead to transcendent change and may, indeed, despite our best efforts, be more help to the system we despise that to the victims of that system whom we are trying to help.

Castagno is empathetic to the work of teachers and administrators and seeks to avoid blaming teachers for the inequitable state of education. However, *Educated in whiteness* demands that all educators recognise the damage this approach perpetuates, and focus on critically informed, systemic change. As a pre-service teacher educator, former secondary school teacher, and critical race theorist, I expect *Educated in whiteness* will be of interest to multiple audiences. The early chapters, particularly the introduction, would likely provide pre-service teachers with an easy to read but conceptually and culturally challenging primer to racial realist critical race theories of education. Practising teachers and administrators will likely recognise themselves or colleagues within these pages. Similarly, a copy of this book for every pre-service teacher educator would be a worthwhile investment for any education faculty.

**References**

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