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Outline:

Ndura's literature review examines research from the 1970s through the 1990s and reveals a general history of bias in American textbooks, particularly in the areas of cultural representation and gender roles. To discover if similar biases are present in ESL textbooks, Ndura examined six different books used in a school district in the Western United States which she felt were "representative of the sort of textbooks commonly used to teach English as a Second Language in U.S. schools" (Ndura, 145). Ndura read student and teacher editions of the textbooks, as well as the ancillary teaching materials, paying close attention to the books' themes and accompanying images. Based on her examination, Ndura found three major types of bias: stereotyping, invisibility, and unreality. She addresses each type in her article, giving examples from the textbooks as proof of bias. She also offers five practical strategies for teachers to use to overcome textbook bias.

Comments:

Ndura's overview of ESL textbooks mirrors some of my own teaching experiences using English and history textbooks. Information is often presented from a very White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant perspective, which tends to marginalize the historic roles of women and people of color. This was especially obvious in stories about early America. Until recently, for example, most social studies books omitted Sacagawea when discussing Lewis and Clark, but even one of the ESL books Ndura examined includes the roles of Sacagawea and York, an enslaved African American. I believe that Ndura's article supports the argument that biased textbooks hamper students' abilities to accept other cultures and to deal with personal experiences with discrimination. She also emphasizes the important role textbooks play in enculturation, which Bonvillain (2010) describes as the process of transmitting a culture's beliefs, language and behaviors from generation to generation.

The biases Ndura described in her article are examples of how American textbooks tend to promote the presumed status quo, even though that cultural norm has undergone radical changes over the past 50 years. Despite our changing culture, the textbooks Ndura examined still present women at work in the kitchen or with children and men in roles of power and at work using complex tools and equipment. By perpetuating this cultural model, these ESL textbooks are implicitly limiting the abilities of their female readers who may rely on the books as the authority for what is accepted in America. Teachers should follow Ndura's advice to combat this misconception and help all students – regardless of race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, etc. – become successful. Overall, I agree with Ndura's view that using biased textbooks without the addition of multicultural perspectives misrepresents a society's cultural model. Students should experience education from different viewpoints to learn that just because someone or something is “different” does not mean that it is “wrong.”

Excerpts:

- “Instructional materials play the role of cultural mediators as they transmit overt and covert societal values, assumptions and images. Thus, they have the power to positively or negatively influence immigrant students' perceptions of their new culture and their ability to acculturate and succeed” (Ndura, 143).
- “Uncovering textbook biases and reflecting upon their potential influence on students' learning experiences and on their self-image will empower teachers to become more culturally responsive and to motivate their students to take charge of their acculturation process and actively participate in the transformation of current unfavorable societal realities” (Ndura, 150).
- “Students must learn that the viewpoints presented in textbooks can be questioned and challenged, and that there is not one truth, but multiple truths. Most of all, they must learn

that uncovering biases and stereotypes and discussing them openly is a constructive way to counter the development of new misconceptions and to promote mutual understanding” (Ndura, 152)

Questions:

1. What have your experiences with textbooks been like? Describe any encounters you may have had as a student or teacher with a blatantly obvious example of bias.
2. Ndura’s example of invisibility in ESL textbooks focuses on the omission of religion; however, most public schools do not want teachers discussing religion unless it is a specific part of the curriculum like in world history. How could a teacher explain the role of religion in America without “preaching” to his/her students?
3. Should textbooks (and teachers) offer contemporary examples of Americans struggling with discrimination and/or prejudice, or should the classroom be used as a haven away from the “drama” of students’ daily lives? Explain.

Citations:

Bonvillain, N. (2010). *Language, culture, and communication: The meaning of messages*. (6th ed). Prentice Hall.

Ndura, E. (2004). ESL and cultural bias: An analysis of elementary through high school textbooks in the Western United States of America. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 17(2), 143-153.