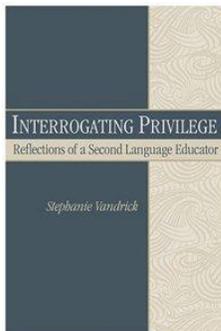


Professional Book Review

Vandrick, S. (2009). *Interrogating Privilege: Reflections of a Second Language Educator*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 182 pp., ISBN: 978-0-472-03394-2 (pbk). \$23.95.

Reviewed by Hoi Yuen Chan, University of Wyoming, U. S. A.



As a prospective TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) educator, I see a better picture of what it is like to be an effective one in higher education after reading Vandrick's *Interrogating Privilege: Reflections of a Second Language Educator*. Effective teachers know that class objectives, class materials, and pedagogy are important elements in a classroom setting. Furthermore, they acknowledge the importance of individual identities such as gender, social class, sexual orientation, religion, and different kinds of privilege and under-privilege, which each student brings to the classroom.

Vandrick's *Interrogating Privilege: Reflections of a Second Language Educator* illustrates how these important elements interact with one another in many different ways as she describes her experiences as a TESOL educator at the university level. In the book, Vandrick shares stories based on her many years of thinking, teaching, and writing about teaching life and the life of educators. She hopes that this book can not only provide TESOL educators with the opportunity to engage in a meaningful dialogue with each other, but also encourage educators from other fields to pay more careful attention to students of underprivileged backgrounds, who bring their individual identities to classrooms.

The book of Vandrick's personal essays contains 10 chapters, each with questions for reflection and discussion in the end. At the beginning of each chapter Vandrick shares either a story or a note because she believes that "personal narrative can be a powerful and effective form of scholarly writing . . ." (p. 9). Each chapter addresses the issue of privilege in the lives of educators, especially TESOL educators; some of the chapters look at the combination of educators' teaching lives, writing lives, and personal lives, whereas others focus on one of these issues. Although Vandrick highly values personal narrative, she also incorporates academic analysis of these narratives in her writing.

In the introduction chapter, the author uses traditional academic style to provide readers with her background and her dilemma as an educator with respect to her gender and social class. She also describes how different classes

interact with different kinds of privileges, a topic which is seldom discussed in classrooms, pointing out the fact that middle-class identities are almost never touched upon.

In chapter 2, Vandrick shows us her life as a child in India and shares how she makes the connection between her experiences there and years of teaching TESOL and how backgrounds, identities, living conditions, and beliefs affect teaching and scholarly work. In chapter 3, the author uses tea as a symbol of colonialism to focus on the issue of privilege. In chapter 4, Vandrick discusses her 30 years of teaching experience and many struggles she had to deal with as a young, female TESOL faculty member in her institution. She describes the low status of TESOL faculty and ESL students within the institution. However, she strongly believes that ESL status will grow with the passage of time and effort if TESOL faculty truly care about their students and believe in their profession.

Chapter 5 is a tribute to the author's deceased father who influenced her life in a positive way. She also discusses her three new "academic fathers" whom she admires and is grateful for. Her first mentor was supportive of her, even helping her find a job during the difficult time when she was laid off. Vandrick's second mentor helped bring more justice and equity to the university, especially to her department. Her last mentor was a new dean of the College of Arts and Science in which the TESOL program was housed. This new dean believed that fair treatment makes a strong faculty and consequently makes a strong university. More importantly, her academic fathers all believed in equity and justice, which gives her hope that TESOL faculty will continue to grow in status and that working conditions will be changed for the better. In chapter 6, Vandrick explores how the intersection between gender and class in the TESOL setting affects female international students and female faculty. She believes that gender plays a role in social class, and she is concerned about the inequities that women continue to suffer. In chapter 7, the author discusses the intersection of social class and sexual orientation, maintaining that both are "intimately connected" (p. 109). She feels that sexual identities and orientations are not addressed enough in TESOL and suggests that, as educators, we advocate for those with individual identities who are oppressed or stigmatized.

In the final two chapters, Vandrick shifts her focus to the topic of scholarly writing. She considers herself as a "late-bloomer" in writing because she began to write at the age of 40. She points out that age and gender are not issues in writing and publishing papers and encourages those who have dreamed of writing and publishing to persevere, since it is never too late to start. In chapter 9, the author describes the different types of writing groups she belongs to and the vital role these groups play in supporting, assisting, and encouraging her academic and writing life. At the end of the chapter, she encourages readers to join or start groups regardless of types of privilege they may lack.

Vandrick concludes with a reflection on her 35 years of teaching and on what she has learned during this time. She presents the benefits and challenges of being an aging educator, especially a female aging educator. However, she

strongly believes that different joys and challenges are experienced in every stage of one's life. She looks forward to both the positive and negative experiences ahead.

Many stories and personal narratives of the author makes *Interrogating Privilege* both engaging and easily accessible. The book would encourage other TESOL educators, as it did to me, to move on with faith and confidence in the field of TESOL. What really stands out for me is the fact that Vandrick considers herself as a "late-bloomer" in scholarly writing because I also consider myself a "late-bloomer" in scholarly writing and publishing. This chapter has helped me see that there is still hope for late-bloomers, such as me, to achieve their dream of an academic career; it also has given me the courage to write and publish academic work. I highly recommend this book to all educators, especially to those who are and will be working in the field of TESOL, those who are struggling in their academic lives, those who lack confidence in their academic writing and publishing, and those who lack various privileges in life. Vandrick gives us hope that with time and effort the field of TESOL will eventually be recognized, acknowledged, and valued in all levels and in all institutions in America.