

Book Review of: *Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education in Canada*

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Currently, Canada is in a post-TRC moment: the 2015 TRC or Truth and Reconciliation Commission report marks a break point in the history of its intercultural relationships at national scale; and the implications of TRC for the academy and education (and the nation as a whole) are still being worked out. This book is catalysed by, and part of, that outworking process, and its chapters are oriented in relation to this post-TRC context. How can TRC be reflected and implemented in education and research? This edited collection presents multiple lenses on decolonizing and indigenizing education, as part of a way to answer this challenging question. Edited by Sheila Cote-Meek and Taima Moeke-Pickering, and published by Canadian Scholars, this attractive book contains 15 topic chapters and an Introduction, and is available in softcover or e-book. Its striking teal cover features an image by an Indigenous painter, picked up in the art design of the chapters, and explained/attributed in front matter.

Eight chapters are sole-authored; six have two or three authors, and one is co-authored by a group of nine authors (seven of whom identify as Indigenous, mostly Cree). Of a total of 32 contributors to the book, both editors and all chapter lead authors are women, with five men including ‘Elder Bob Cardinal’ named as co-authors. These numbers suggest Indigenous Education in Canada (and anecdotally in other parts of the world as well) is currently being led by women. Both editors are Indigenous (the first from Canada, the second a Māori from Aotearoa living and working in Canada), but overall the contributors self-identify in one of three groups of similar size: Indigenous, including one Kanaka Maoli from Hawai’i (working at UBC) and Moeke-Pickering, the Māori editor; Métis; and Settler (aka White Canadian). The first group of six chapters under the theme of ‘Indigenous Epistemologies’ have mainly Indigenous authors, while the second group of nine chapters under the theme of ‘Decolonizing Post-Secondary Institutions’ have mainly Métis

and Settler authors. Gender and ethnicity are simple categories, prone to the ever-present problems of homogenizing and reductionist assumptions, but useful nonetheless for sketching the scope and flavour of such a collection.

As a whole, this collection takes the pulse of the Canadian academy and education system in the immediate post-TRC phase. Through multiple first-person accounts it provides a snapshot of presumably 'typical experiences' occurring in institutions across this vast post-colonial multicultural nation, and celebrates what has been achieved in a range of settings. It also sets out the kinds of challenges ahead in the immediate and longer-term future. Given that all the chapters include first-hand accounts of experience (to various extents), the book itself is rather like a form of 'circlework' - an Indigenous concept adopted into research methodology, and explicitly referred to in the chapter with nine authors. Most chapters start with testimony and/or reporting on own experience, and include commentary connecting the authors' perspectives and work to relevant theory. Given the profile of perspectives it includes, this book is like a circle or roundtable that comments "from both sides of the intercultural hyphen" (Stewart, 2018, p. 767) marking the relationship between Indigenous and Settler peoples in Canada.

More than a conventional edited collection, each chapter includes some discussion questions, a glossary, and further readings/websites, and the preface notes that the book "will be useful across a range of undergraduate and graduate courses and programs in Indigenous studies, education, social work, health and social sciences, and humanities" and "will also have application in other fields, including health and justice" (p. x). How well does this implied claim as a textbook stack up? Undoubtedly, we need more teaching texts on the topics this book addresses. Given the dearth of available textbooks, perhaps the claim is reasonable. But the question arises as to whether an edited collection format is suitable for a teaching text per se; particularly one comprising a series of first-person accounts of experience, with variable theorization. By its very nature, this book does not provide a high-level exposition suitable for pedagogical use. As a series of reflective essays on an ill-defined topic, the chapters do not form a logical progression of intellectual content building up a coherent presentation of a field, as is required of a textbook. The questions appended to each chapter are variable in scope and style, to be expected given each chapter has different authors. Overall, the addition of a few questions and further readings/websites to the chapters

seems a bit of an after-thought, or bolt-on strategy, which is ineffective for turning an edited collection into a textbook, and adds little to the inherent value of the collection, hence slightly annoying (to this reader, at least). To conclude this review, the following paragraphs offer commentary on three selected chapters, as representing the book's contents.

Chapter 5 is titled *Thinking with Kihkipiw: Exploring an Indigenous Theory of Assessment and Evaluation for Teacher Education* and is the Cree-centred chapter collectively written by nine authors, already mentioned above. This chapter portrays explicit use of circlework as methodology for exploring the questions it investigates: the barriers to decolonizing, Indigenizing and reconciliation efforts in the Teacher Education Program on which the authors work, and how Indigenous knowledge can inform design of evaluation and assessments for coursework. Apart from the brief Introduction and Conclusion sections, the chapter comprises a series of statements attributed to one of the nine authors; extracts from four sequential 'rounds' of circlework, organised under (post-hoc?) section headings. The statements contain a mix of content: nuggets of Indigenous knowledge; narrative accounts of classroom interventions that had been attempted; reflective responses to the motivating questions; and comments on links between the methodology used in writing the chapter and classroom assessment in teaching practice. In both form and content, this chapter is somewhat of a microcosm of the whole book: eclectic, intriguing, aspirational, and rather indeterminate in relation to achievement of its specific aims and claims. As with all Indigenous scholarship, each different reader will tend to take different meanings and learnings from this chapter, and book.

Chapter 7 is titled *Is Decolonization Possible in the Academy?* and sole-authored by Lynn Lavallee, who identifies as Anishinaabe Métis. The biting title question is reflected in the critical analysis of this chapter, presenting sections with detailed examinations of the key terms, reconciliation, decolonization, and indigenization. These usefully focused sections are preceded with an introduction pointing out that Indigenous scholars have been fighting for the aims of TRC for many decades, and recalling the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, notable for the lack of any action following its recommendations. Lavallee points out that many Indigenous people are thus "a bit sceptical" (p. 117) about the current interest, while recognizing it as a "wave we can ride" (p. 117) in an analogy from the Indigenous Hawai'ian sport of surfing. The concepts

of ‘reconciliation, decolonization and indigenization’ lend themselves to reductionism, at “risk of being interpreted as a box that can be checked off once accomplished” (p. 118), thereby defying the consistent advice from ‘Indigenous experts’ that such processes are the work of lifetimes.

Reconciliation is “an attractive sound bite” (p. 118) but is seldom defined; its origins in Roman Catholic discourse are problematic for Indigenous peoples, given the role played by religion in colonization. As a concept, reconciliation seems to offer more to Settler than Indigenous peoples. Decolonization is “overly ambitious” (p. 120) in reference to institutional reform, often claimed by an institution in contradiction of ongoing experiences of racism endured by Indigenous students and staff, who are often expected to take responsibility for such work, and can easily end up as pawns in their institution’s ‘decolonizing exercise.’ The author insets snippets of personal experience within well-crafted philosophical discussions, presenting useful distillations for teaching purposes, and thereby upholding the claim as textbook.

The book’s final chapter 15 is titled *The Future for Indigenous Education: How Social Media Is Changing Our Relationships in the Academy*, written by Moeke-Pickering, already introduced above as a book editor and a Māori “of the Ngāti Pūkeko and Tūhoe tribes from Aotearoa” (p. 267). This chapter argues that Indigenous educators need to “decolonize technology” (p. 267) since digital technology has become (or soon will become) central in all socio-economic activity, politics and education: a condition known as the post-digital (Jandric et al., 2018). Paired with the imperative for Indigenous academics to “write forward” in other words, to “keep writing to future Indigenous academics, students, and allies” makes clear the necessity for Indigenous educators to remain at the leading edge of new waves. “The new frontier for Indigenous education is digital technology” (p. 270). This chapter aims to inspire Indigenous educators to see digital technologies as useful tools for teaching, research and leadership. All the book’s chapters are interested in decolonizing and indigenizing Canadian education; the three chapters featured above illustrate the range of perspectives and approaches taken.

References

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