

Educational Philosophy and Theory

Incorporating ACCESS

ISSN: 0013-1857 (Print) 1469-5812 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rept20>

What is philosophy for indigenous people, in relation to education?

Carl Mika & Georgina Stewart

To cite this article: Carl Mika & Georgina Stewart (2017): What is philosophy for indigenous people, in relation to education?, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2017.1311489](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1311489)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1311489>



Published online: 06 Apr 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 111



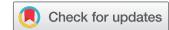
View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rept20>

INTRODUCTION



What is philosophy for indigenous people, in relation to education?

Carl Mika^a and Georgina Stewart^b

^aFaculty of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand; ^bAuckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

Education has attracted the attention of several indigenous scholars as a discipline of particular significance and relevance. Smith (2012) and Pihama (2001) have pointed to the far reach of education at all stages of life, with its influence on such matters as gender, race and selfhood. In that light, education can be thought of as potentially surveillant and materially affective. For indigenous peoples, education is a solid agent of Western thought. Education hence shares similarities with other Western disciplines, but it is especially well placed to mould thought because it is so universally experienced in societies. It therefore exposes a formidable linking between discipline and knowledge in indigenous lives.

We invited interested scholars to contribute to this Special Issue, which takes as its theme the major question of the nature of indigenous philosophy as it intersects with education. It is deliberately broad in focus and, further, encompasses aspects of education that may be considered to belong to the study of philosophy more broadly, not education. Its breadth is apparent in the question title 'What is philosophy for indigenous people, in relation to education?' But to illustrate the interface between philosophy and education for indigenous peoples, we wanted to bring into discussion some of the bases of thinking with which education vigorously participates. The authors for this Issue, therefore, consider the following themes, which are all equally important for indigenous thought and are therefore arranged in no particular order of priority.

What is a method of thinking that either challenges education itself, or may provide the basis of an alternative pedagogy? Here, there are dual emphases: one on indigenous notions of education as a system or discipline, and the other on a way of teaching (and hence learning). It is proposed that there could be completely alternative ways of viewing education and contemplating pedagogy. In Aotearoa, kaupapa Māori oriented education has already challenged dominant Western notions of education, and has proactively implemented other, Māori grounded practices (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Manning et al., 2011; Smith, 1997). Some writers in this Issue have similarly identified that education, as it is currently formulated, is insufficient for indigenous peoples, and Galuvao proposes that Western thought, in the form of Foucault, can be drawn on to innovate Samoan methods of educating and researching. Here, not incidentally, we meet one of the paradoxical tendencies of some counter-colonial indigenous philosophy, drawing as it frequently does, in varying degrees, on Western philosophy for important but tangential thought. Galuvao aims to reconfigure education itself so that, in some synchronicity with the Foucauldian toolbox, a Samoan critical discourse analysis—Tofā'a'anolasi—can evolve. Also highly pragmatic in her approach, Galuvao considers the application of her approach to Samoan students, thereby relinquishing the concept 'indigenous' in favour of her local context. Galuvao elucidates what is at stake for Samoan education from a philosophical perspective, and like the other writers makes it clear that 'indigenous' is useful only to a certain extent.

In some measure, all contributors have sought to challenge education as an instrument of colonisation. Western authors such as Illich (1971) and Oliver (1998) have noted the confusion of education with schooling, emphasising the role education can play in prescribing one's worldview. Authors in this Special Issue naturally engage with the overall intention of dominant Western modes of education from an indigenous worldview. When proposing an alternative pedagogy, some have considered that the ground rules of Western thought—such as thoroughgoing logic, for instance—can be mediated whilst proposing a more phenomenological method. Archibald (2008), an indigenous scholar, has identified story telling as a method of teaching and learning; her suggestions mitigate what Robinson (2011) has identified as an education process based predominantly in linear thought. To that extent, philosophy is as much political as it is abstract, and education reveals the importance of other methods of teaching and learning than those that draw on modernity. Kulago reflects this problematic in her article, defying any suggestion that education and philosophy cannot possibly be enacted by one's ancestors. Drawing on the notion of Dewey's Utopians, Kulago suggests that a Diné philosophy of education directly resonates with the Kinaaldá ceremony. The ceremony is implicitly counter to orthodox Western (and colonising) modes of education but, importantly, is also productive for a continued ancestral relationship which—it will come as no surprise to the indigenous reader—is at once philosophical and educational.

Also at stake for the authors is the nature of the knowledge that is transmitted by education. Is it compatible with indigenous notions of the world? Ahekanew, Andreotti, Cooper, and Hireme (2014) have argued that education, derived from the West, is tied up with modernity and that any solutions proposed are derived ultimately from that source (and will automatically bolster this ontology). One of the authors, Georgina Stewart, has earlier identified (see Stewart, 2012) that indigenous knowledge assumes a counter to the essentialist epistemology of the West. Can indigenous thought therefore worry the supremacy of Western knowledge in education? Indigenous writers Duran and Duran (1995) argue that indigenous ceremony has the potential to dislodge some of the spiritual problems that the Western tradition brings with it. Its mere presence could then disturb the ascendancy of dominant thought (and thus indigenous knowledge may possess its own, self-originating attributes). Or more pessimistically, could it add to a rationalism that education prefers, thus performing a hegemony in obedience to modernity? Or can rationalism provide a panacea? A similar focus could centre specifically on the philosophical similarities that indigenous and Western epistemologies share at certain points (Whitt, 2009), in relation to education.

The nature of opposition or commonality between one culture and another, or between one mode of thought and another within one culture, is hence a fraught issue for indigenous peoples. How this philosophical intersection occurs is complex, and there are certain relational phenomena that come to bear in this form of contact. With that very point in mind, in our current issue Stewart argues for a co-constitutional relationship that is not confined to the discourse of 'knowledge' (but includes it). There is an exchange between colonising and indigenous facets of education and philosophy, and Stewart acknowledges its existence within the performance of the *hyphen*. The flow between settler and indigenous is at work at all times, and can be negotiated cautiously by the Māori thinker. The hyphen is therefore more an ontological orientation than simply a piece of punctuation. Keeping its deeper significance at the forefront of her article, Stewart delivers an injunction to both parties: engage more authentically and sustainedly with critical thought from the other side of the hyphen. The issue of oppositions that Stewart highlights is also raised by Noaparast, who shows that tensions between approaches are often hard to resolve but are not necessarily fixed. Noaparast argues that the theoretical challenges confronting Islamic philosophy of education in Iran are, according to some, resolvable. Religion and democracy are capable of various readings, and are therefore not so thoroughly opposed as frequently stated. Human agency, in particular, can be commonly imputed to both liberal democracy and religion. Noaparast, however, further identifies some of the problems implicit to the *practical* aspect of philosophy of education: in many respects, they are in direct opposition to what he notes are the cultural values of Iran.

Of particular concern to many indigenous groups is the critical reclamation of knowing and being that are particular to their local groups. The act of retrieving knowing and being makes for some

interesting debates, and Ahmed aims to illustrate the challenges associated with trying to resurrect specifically Muslim philosophies within the influence of the West. Ahmed looks to the philosophies of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in order to explore this phenomenon. Al-Attas locates facets of traditional Muslim philosophy within the realities of colonial settings, thus setting his metaphysics in opposition to (but always with a regard towards) secularism. Ahmed suggests that, in contrast to the Western approach which inquires into knowing and being on the premise of doubt, any reclamation of them must be premised on the purpose that lies at a Muslim individual's core. Similarly, Mika and Southey draw on traditional Māori metaphysics with that same purpose in mind: to explicate a philosophical method of research that they call '*whakaaro*', which loosely but inadequately translates as 'to think'. Whakaaro opens up possibilities for responding to text and data in a counter-colonially Māori way, with the Māori researcher's essence at the forefront. Thus, a Māori response to the coldly collected and analysed data that tends to proliferate in the West involves reacting to that material in an emotional and holistic way.

What comes to the fore in all articles is a sense that philosophy of education for indigenous peoples is immediately linked with well-being. Indeed, they are inseparable. Moreover, education is not simply the act of teaching and learning. The authors, from their diverse backgrounds and locations, all have these concerns in mind, and accentuate the potential of those concerns for further thought about the philosophy of education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

- Ahekanew, C., Andreotti, V., Cooper, G., & Hireme, H. (2014). Beyond epistemic provincialism: De-provincializing indigenous resistance. *AlterNative*, 10, 216–231.
- Archibald, J.-A. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Bishop, R., & Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Duran, E., & Duran, B. (1995). *Native American postcolonial psychology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling society*. London: Calder & Boyars.
- Manning, R., Macfarlane, A., Skerrett, M., Cooper, G., De Oliveira, V., & Emery, T. (2011). A new net to go fishing: Messages from international evidence-based research and kaupapa Māori research. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 40, 92–101.
- Oliver, R. (1998). The ideological reduction of education1. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 30, 299–302.
- Pihama, L. (2001). *Tihei mauri ora: Honouring our voices: Mana wahine as a kaupapa Māori theoretical framework* [Let there be life!: Maori women's existence Maori oriented theoretical framework] (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Auckland, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://www.kaupapaMāori.com>
- Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative* (2nd ed.). West Sussex: Capstone Publishing Ltd..
- Smith, G. (1997). *The development of kaupapa Māori: Theory and praxis* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Auckland, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2292/623>
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research & indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). London: Zed Books.
- Stewart, G. (2012). Achievements, orthodoxies and science in kaupapa Māori schooling. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 47, 51–63.
- Whitt, L. (2009). *Science, colonialism, and indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.