

REVIEW

Indigenous and decolonizing studies in education: mapping the long view

Edited by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang. (2019) NY, OX: Routledge*.

Reviewed by Sandra Wooltorton , Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame, Australia.
E-mail: sandra.wooltorton@nd.edu.au

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This book is the first in a series entitled ‘Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education’, edited by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. I recommend that every environmental educator read the book and reread it. In my case, each time I pick it up, I find some new wisdom in it. The book is positive, constructive and optimistic about Indigenous and decolonising futures, which makes it a superb read in this age of climate chaos and sociocultural harms. As a collection of chapters, the orientation is towards healthy futures for all, with place-based steps mapped. Some readers not familiar with the basic concepts addressed may find the book confronting, offering learning to step beyond white privilege and take confident steps towards a better world. Environmental education *needs* Indigenous and decolonising education, for a richer, more critical and deeper scholarship. Each chapter inspires transformative learning and new directions for educators committed to making a difference.

Following Madeline Whetung and Sarah Wakefield (2019) in chapter nine, ‘Colonial conventions: Institutionalised research relationships and decolonising research ethics’, as reviewer I accept responsibility for acknowledging my positionality. I recognise the Wardandi Noongar custodians and their lands, being ocean and wetlands Country¹ where I am presently located in the hinterland of Geographe Bay. This Indigenous Country is my home, in the Noongar sense of home, with its implicit meanings of relationship, kin, mutual obligation to care, love of place and implicit sacredness. My background is multi-generational Australian with ancestral links to Britain. I stand with Indigenous people and call for social justice on Indigenous terms, Indigenous-guided climate care and biodiversity recovery for a regenerative world. This acknowledgement makes clear my worldview and the lens through which I regard the book.

In 1990, David commented that, ‘all education is environmental education. By what is included, emphasised or ignored, students learn that they are part of or apart from the natural world’ (p. 49), by what is included or excluded. That is, children learn they are part of or separate from the natural world by how and what education they engage in. This book widens Orr’s statement, helping readers understand that all education is Indigenous education, by its presence or absence. Additionally, the book celebrates creativity and the arts, in its placement of the cover artist’s statement even before the series editor’s introduction, and by its creative layout in which chapter order resembles a river-like design, enabling reimagining of the naturalised divisions within education (Tuhiwai Smith, Tuck, & Yang, 2019, p. 16).

*The online version of this article has been updated since original publication. A notice detailing the change has also been published.

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The collection of chapters offers a journey of seeing through Indigenous worldviews, beginning with two key principles: water is life, and land is our first teacher, thus recognising Indigenous continuity, relationship and presence, the starting point for decolonisation. As a reminder of what keeps many of us in education, particularly in a neoliberal policy era, Eve Tuck reflects on why she stays in education:

First, this is a field that, when at its best, embraces and anticipates change. Change, the likelihood of change, the certainty of change with uncertain outcomes, are foundational to questions of education and learning. The whole field pivots on how change happens, and how our efforts as humans can bring about the changes we want to see (Tuhiwai Smith et al., 2019, p. 8).

Tuck's reflection suggests intent to transgress rigid structures and reimagine education for its potential to decolonise systems and standard practices, revealing living relationships with more-than-human worlds. As Smith, Tuck and Yang note, the book is written as and about Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies. They write, "[W]e are emphasising land, water and the more-than-human world, emphasising relations as accountability, emphasising a past-present-future that exceeds any nation-state or modern imperial formation" (2019, p. 22).

The book's purpose is to illustrate hesitations, edges and the bold futures of Indigenous and decolonising studies in education. To enable and empower Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in education, calls for truth telling in personal, national and systemic ways. The book shows how decolonisation brings forward Indigenous stories in all their complexities, including intergenerational trauma caused by historic violence, national disregard for Indigenous perspectives and values, and the continuing colonial quest for cultural landscapes. To walk together in relearning how to inhabit our living, vital home-places requires new practices of education for regenerating colonised landscapes in full knowledge of local and national histories and presences.

Space precludes a full coverage of the chapters, but most – including the introduction – are must-reads. Sandra Styres' (2019) chapter entitled, 'Literacies of land: Decolonizing narratives, storying and literature' should be a primer for each first semester teacher education student. Necessary concepts are included, clearly and articulately described. In chapter two, Haa Shageinyaa: 'Point your canoe downstream and keep your head up', Naadli Todd Lee Ormiston (2019) writes with beauty about a portion of a 55-day canoe journey of becoming familiar with water as life, land as teacher and relations through his homelands with his brother. Through the journey, he documented his learnings, strengthened his own identity and spirituality, and recognised the importance of place and much more.

Another outstanding chapter is chapter nine, referred to earlier. Whetung and Wakefield (2019) confront institutionalised research ethics processes where protocols for working with Indigenous people often disregard Indigenous researchers. This is a must-read for all researchers. As a whole, the book demands serious reflection on the history and practice of environmental education. How did environmental education in colonised countries separate from its ethical obligations to environmental caretakers with age-old knowledge systems? More importantly, how do we rethink, redesign and re-establish environmental education for reshaping education systems in colonised countries? Sustainability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures are still Australian cross-curriculum priorities. Finally, it is time to recognise that to be sustainable demands a journey of decolonisation and celebration of living places with Indigenous presence.

In Australia, environmental education is age-old. We all live our lives on Indigenous land and we walk on stories embedded in our landscapes, in full view, always calling to us to pay attention. It is fitting to conclude this review with a quote from the Introduction:

[E]ach of the chapters understands that the 21st century will be one of regeneration. The horrors of settler colonialism of capitalism will not be the end chapter of the human story. It is powerful to write from this notion as a given. It is powerful to consider, as a baseline, that this millennium will be one of decolonization. (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2019, p. 22).

This book is an environmental education milestone. After this book, I recommend other books in this series. We all need to play a role in challenging and transforming the structures of oppression, and in supporting those who have already taken the lead.

Note

1 When capitalised, in Australia the term Country conveys an Indigenous-inspired sense of its meaning that is inclusive of kinship, spirit, wellbeing and more than human beings and systems.

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Sandra Wooltorton is a Senior Research Fellow with the Nulungu Research Institute at the University of Notre Dame Australia's Broome Campus. She is a transdisciplinary researcher, with a background in cultural geography and education. Sandra has an interest in applying Indigenous philosophy to improve administrative systems and structures affecting Indigenous wellbeing and in generating solutions to problems of society and environment.