

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education in Canada

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education in Canada

by Sheila Cote-Meek & Taima Moeke-Pickering

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Sheila Cote-Meek and Taima Moeke-Pickering's book, *Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education in Canada* highlights the damaging impact of colonialism on current practices in education, and seeks to right the wrongs of colonist education practices by incorporating Indigenous histories, knowledges and pedagogies into present day curriculum. By highlighting the history and impact of colonialism on preserving inequities, this book speaks to a critical issue of discriminatory practices deeply entrenched in the education system.

This 316-page edited volume, consisting of 15 chapters, written by 32 contributors, is organized thematically in two parts. Part one (Chapters 1-6) addresses Indigenous epistemologies: exploring the place of Indigenous knowledges in post-secondary curriculum, including Indigenization of the curriculum and pedagogy. Part two (Chapters 7-15) focuses on decolonizing post-secondary institutions: building space in the Academy for Indigenous peoples, resistance, and reconciliation.

Chapter 1 provides an articulation of Indigenous epistemologies by rooting it in language, culture, community and land. Given the centrality of land to sustaining and nourishing Indigenous societies, this chapter provides strategies for implementing land-based education.

Chapter 2 illustrates Anishinaabe culture, the intimate relationship with the land and Indigenous knowledges being grounded in the lands (p. 28). This chapter also illuminates the eradication of authority of Indigenous women, and makes clear that Canadian laws, through the *Indian Act*, have led to the gender imbalance of contemporary Anishinaabe societies. Such "governance structures were complicit in the marginalization of Indigenous women and the knowledges that enabled their society's survival" (p. 27).

Chapter 3 distinguishes between the political, legal and cultural Métis identities and highlights the omission of Métis perspectives, histories, and cultures within the educational context. Reconciliation in this chapter is defined as “a way of changing personal and institutional policies and practices to create more equitable educational outcomes” (p. 37). Métissage is defined as “a metaphor for both the fluid and discordant mixture of race, language, culture, and gender that constitutes as postcolonial experience and identity” (Donald, 2004). Thus, reconciliation through a Métissage approach will benefit all Canadians in learning in the context of global citizenship and social justice education (p. 37).

Chapter 4 examines an educational journey for Indigenous students who inhabit the Western education paradigm and reveals the ramifications of settler-colonialism on education. It also highlights the role Canada has played in the intergenerational trauma of Indigenous peoples. This chapter probes us to consider *how Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges can be engaged as legitimate, relevant, and valid within the context of cognitive imperialism* (Battiste, 2000).

Chapter 5 explores the interrelated and interdependent nature of Indigenous language systems, and asks thought provoking questions around understanding Indigenous assessment and evaluation: *What does being responsible to one's peoples, ancestors, culture, language, self, and relationships as a teacher look like?* (p. 76) and *How do we know what students know, and how do we measure that?* (p. 77).

Chapter 6 uses autoethnography to highlight colonial violence that takes place against Indigenous women within academic institutions. Colonial violence is defined as relationships, processes and conditions that allow for colonialism to take place, physically and psychologically. It continues to manifest itself in current day practices through the exclusion of history from the education curriculum, through the denial of rights to self-determination for particular marginalized groups, and through continued racial atrocities deeply embedded into systems and structures, contributing to the demise of student success. “Colonial violence often goes unaddressed because it is legitimized through various existing systems developed to up-hold unequal social relations” (p. 101). The contributors invite us to think about our own relationship and responsibility in engendering safe spaces for Indigenous women.

Chapter 7 challenges the notion of reconciliation, arguing that “harm, injustices, systemic racism, microaggressions, and blatant anti-Indigenous racism are still happening” (p. 120). Looking at the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the 2015 TRC report, this chapter questions the progress that has been made.

Chapter 8 introduces ‘academic’ reconciliation (academic institutions supporting Indigenization and decolonization initiatives) and makes the strong claim that anti-oppressive strategies associated with decolonization and Indigenization is the key to reciprocal and respectful relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (p. 136).

Chapter 9 focuses on two faculty members at the University of Winnipeg, committed to decolonization through a critical race approach, rooted in curriculum. This chapter converges black urban struggle and Indigenous oppression, resistance, and cultural reclamation (p. 157), and asks *how university teachers can change their pedagogical practices to better align with university claims of decolonization and/or indigenization?* (p. 169)

Chapter 10 features a preliminary study of a mandatory Indigenous content course in teacher preparation at a Southern Ontario university, with a focus on the consequences of racism and settler colonialism in policies, curriculum, and teaching practices.

Chapter 11 calls for making decolonization a priority in universities. The central theme of this chapter is embodied in the question, *how might existing institutional interests in disrupting colonial patterns and building less oppressive ones be transformed, so that change is realized?* It offers three actions to bring about change: accepting other learning paradigms and knowledge systems; closing the capacity gaps that currently exist; and sustaining partnerships with Indigenous knowledge keepers, leaders, Elders, and communities (p. 204).

Chapter 12 argues that without redress, “truth and reconciliation in Canada will remain a vague, imagined ideal” (p. 213). The term ‘pedagogy of witness’ is introduced to emphasize non-Indigenous participation in the healing journey of Indigenous survivors, through active listening, story remembering, and story sharing (p. 222). The chapter concludes by asking two powerful questions: *Is reconciliation a tenable goal for Canadians? What would need to happen to achieve decolonization in Canada?* (p. 223).

In Chapter 13, two White educators offer perspectives on decolonizing education using anti-racist pedagogies. The term ‘comfortable diversity’ is used to explain “surface-level symbolic initiatives that are added to, rather than in place of, existing power structures” (p. 232).

Chapter 14 draws on poetic inquiry and Indigenous conversation research methodology to address missing histories of state-sponsored sterilization of Indigenous women, citing “over 4,000 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada” (Radek, 2011). This chapter also emphasizes the pivotal role of the educator in its agency in helping students overcome trauma.

Chapter 15 underscores the importance of incorporating digital technology in order for decolonizing and Indigenizing strategies to be fully achieved. It calls on Indigenous academics to write to future Indigenous academics through a process called storying, which “empowers Indigenous authors to situate their worldviews, theoretical frameworks, and aspirations for self-determination” (p. 269).

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education in Canada is written by various scholars from across 14 Canadian universities. The inclusion of multiple voices speaks to diversity across cultures (contributors are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), as well as in terms of educational occupations (ranging from Administrative Assistants to PhD Students to Professors). In order to ensure consistency, each contributor situates themselves in the research, offering a personal narrative and context. The questions posed in each chapter offer a space for reflection, and the glossary at the end of each chapter adds to the strength of the book. The methodology used is both a theoretical application as well as case studies. A third research method is introduced in the form of poetry and storytelling.

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education in Canada emphasizes the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledges and worldviews in education. It goes beyond the ‘what’ (systemic barriers hindering student success and overall well-being of Indigenous peoples) and offers the ‘how’ (concrete strategies to bring about change). The book is

inspiring, persuasive and positive, affirming the notion that change *is* possible. Thus, Cote-Meek and Moeke-Pickering's book is recommended for educators, school leaders, practitioners and scholars, in a variety of academic disciplines, who wish to move from the space of understanding Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, to embedding them in pedagogies and curriculum.

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