

2019

Book Review: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Working towards Decolonization, Indigeneity, and Interculturalism

Theresa (Therri) A. Papp
University of Saskatchewan, therri@skmconsulting.ca

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Recommended Citation

Papp, Theresa (Therri) A.. "Book Review: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Working towards Decolonization, Indigeneity, and Interculturalism." *Intersections: Critical Issues in Education* 3, 2 (2019). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/intersections/vol3/iss2/10>

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| BOOK REVIEW |

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Working towards Decolonization, Indigeneity and Interculturalism

edited by Fatima Pirbhai-Illich, Shauneen Pete, and Fran Martin (2017).

Palgrave Macmillan: Switzerland.

261 pp. ISBN- 978-3319463278

Theresa A. Papp

University of Saskatchewan

In *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Working towards Decolonization, Indigeneity and Interculturalism* (2017), the contributing authors present a collective voice that affirms the need to decolonize the education system while presenting culturally responsive pedagogy that challenges the status quo. The essays in this collected work, edited by Fatima Pirbhai-Illich, Shauneen Pete, and Fran Martin, illustrate ways to embrace a more socially just education system by repositioning power, challenging authority, and improving praxis to ultimately improve educational outcomes for students that are marginalized. The contributing authors range from representatives of diaspora, Indigenous, and white allies of education in their common goal to decolonize education, transform teacher practices, indigenize curriculum, improve methods of instruction, advance classroom relationships, and critique assessments. This book is relevant to in-service educators, as well as administrators, policy-makers, teacher educators, researchers, and all levels of politics that call for improved educational outcomes.

The book contains eleven (11) chapters and is organized into five parts. The first section is written by the editors and provides an introduction to set the context for the portions that follow. This provides the reader with an understanding of the origins of culturally-responsive pedagogy (CRP) and its origins from Critical Race Theory (CRT). Ladson-Billings (1995) is acknowledged as the developer of CRP, and it is explained to have three criteria: “(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

Part II has four chapters of which the first three present decolonization in higher education and the preparation of young teachers to enter the profession of education. I found chapter 3, prepared by one of the editors, Shauneen Pete, of particular interest. In part, the interest stemmed from the *Idle No More* movement that had entered the world stage in the winter of 2012-2013 as “a peaceful revolution to honour Indigenous sovereignty and protect the land and water” (Idle No More, 2019) in resistance to the federal Omnibus Bills. It represented a time in Canadian history where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people stood in solidarity and Dr. Pete, a self-identified Cree woman, used this occasion to challenge her students to reflect on their *whiteness*, the education system, racism, and their perceptions of *self*, and *other*. Her pre-service teachers self-described themselves as white and middle-class. In her effort to indigenize her class, she presents the tensions created within the class that emerged, as well as her own self-reflective journey. The last two chapters of this section provide a rich account of teaching English as a second language—the first to refugee mothers in the United States, and the second to teaching young students in Brazil.

Part III is represented by three chapters. The first is written by an Anishnaabekwe woman who shares her experiences in an inner-city school where part of her teaching portfolio was to co-choreograph the school's Indigenous dance troupe. She shares the many questions and comments that came from her colleagues that confronted the style of music, song, and dance that allowed her and her students to tour areas of Canada and the United States as an extra-curricular activity. She goes beyond answering her research question ("What is the significance of song and drum in school?") to giving the reader a glimpse of Anishnaabe traditional practice, and the seventh fire prophecy. She concludes her chapter by an understanding that her non-Indigenous colleagues' questions came from ignorance. King states, "The ignorance is indicative of a common pattern among white, European settlers who *see* the world in ways that make it possible to separate the past from the present and so deny their own complicity in the violences that continue to be perpetrated against First Nations peoples" (citing Cote-Meek, 2014, p. 136). The last two chapters of this section are within a New Zealand context and composed by Māori women; the culturally responsive pedagogy presented here stems from the Te Kotahitanga project and the Effective Teacher Profile (ETP). Māori metaphors were used within the classroom as a means to bridge Māori culture with their Māori students. The final chapter presents four case studies that attempted to improve literacy outcomes through support from either the community or higher-grade students. In both chapters the term "feed forward" was utilized; however, it was not explained, leaving the reader to investigate its meaning. Having previously conducted research in New Zealand at a school that utilized the ETP, I conducted an interview in which I asked what feedforward meant in this context. In this research manuscript, I stated, "the mantra of this school was '*don't tell what you can ask.*' This statement defines the strategy of feedforward where intentional questions are posed to the student to generate reflection and critical thinking to solve problems or improve classwork" (Papp, 2016, p. 9). Feedforward is often associated with inquiry-based learning and exemplifies a technique "that rejects a hegemonic and paternalistic approach to teaching and values the student and his or her voice" (p. 12).

Part IV consists of two chapters that focus on standardized assessments and the effects they have on the outcomes for students whose first language is not English. As Austin states, "the institutionalized practices of standardized testing...not only neglect culturally and linguistically diverse learning but also jeopardize their access to higher education and becoming productive contributors in their communities" (p. 201). Daly presents the context of assessment in Australia wherein literacy assessments in three studies present concern for Indigenous students: the assessments not only lack culturally responsiveness, but are culturally inappropriate.

Part V is the concluding chapter of the book and a space for the editors to connect the previous chapters while providing a reflection on their own experiences. The editors explain the themes that mitigate against culturally responsive pedagogy as found in the various chapters of this book, as well as the prejudices that make culturally responsive pedagogy incomprehensible at times to educators. This chapter concludes with the editors' thoughts on decolonizing teacher education and affirm that "this book is a project in criticality" (Martin, Pirbhai-Illich, & Pete, 2017, p. 247). Primarily, one of the two concerns presented regarding culturally responsive pedagogy are that white educators tend to focus superficially and have a narrow understanding of culture that includes deficit dispositions, differences, and "changing the Other" (Martin et al., 2017, p. 235). The second concern is that culturally responsive pedagogy is met with resistance fundamentally because of white privilege, which is deeply steeped in the education system, curricula, and the teaching profession. Mainstream educators are predominantly white females which adds to the dilemma of culturally responsive pedagogy not being intelligible. Throughout the chapters, there are four macro-themes the authors identify: (1) colonial thinking; (2) westernized hegemony of what counts as education; (3) marginalization and othering; and, (4) hegemony of the English language.

All authors in this book affirm that radical change is required in the current education system as hegemony exists in all corners of the world. Indigenous peoples of the world represent 370 million people. If all were within the same space, Indigenous peoples would be the third largest country in the world after China and India. It has been acknowledged throughout this book that Indigenous people have lower educational outcomes compared to non-Indigenous people. As an educator at the post-secondary level and a researcher focused on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, I found this book to be of great interest in terms of integrating theory into praxis and would highly recommend it to seasoned as well as pre-service educators. Decolonization can only happen when hard questions are asked about whiteness.

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Author

Theresa (Therri) A. Papp is a Ph.D. Candidate and researcher at the University of Saskatchewan and an instructor at the post-secondary level for Saskatchewan Polytechnic. She is the recipient of numerous scholarships including the Doctoral Scholarship in Community Engagement (2013), Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship (2014), and the recipient of a three-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship. In 2016, she earned the prestigious President's Innovation Award for implementing innovative techniques in her classrooms. Her research has extended from Canada to New Zealand with her primary focus on improving educational attainment levels for Indigenous students.