

Cash Ahenakew, Assistant Professor of Educational Studies, the University of British Columbia. Email: cash.ahenakew@ubc.ca

*Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit.* Battiste, Marie. (2013). Saskatoon, Canada: Purich Publishing. 224 pp. ISBN 9781895830774.

Marie Battiste begins the last paragraph of *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* with the sentence, “For educators, Aboriginal or not, it is not enough to rebel against injustices unless we also rebel against our lack of imagination and caring” (p. 190). She conducts a very serious critique of Canada’s Eurocentric education system and the effects of its devastating policies and practices against the Aboriginal peoples of that nation. The fundamental question underlying the critique is: Why is it that Aboriginal children do less well in education than non-Aboriginal children? The answers to this question are revealed in the following chapter titles: “Forced Assimilation” (chapter 2), “Historical Roots of Schooling” (chapter 3), and “Confronting Racism” (chapter 6).

Battiste is not only concerned about detailing the negative consequences of past injustices; she is also adamant that with the wholesale switching to Aboriginal “voices”—as one manifestation of the Indigenous Renaissance—there is a need to draw on and link micro with macro analyses. The micro examples are found in storytelling (chapter 1), literacy and languages (chapter 7) and displacing cognitive imperialism (chapter 8). At the macro level of analysis she focuses on ethical spaces for decolonization (chapter 5) and constitutional reconciliation (chapter 9). It is in chapter 4, “Creating the Indigenous Renaissance”, where a blending of the micro and macro is most clearly articulated as a “struggle”: firstly, to sensitize the Eurocentric consciousness in general and educators in particular; and secondly, to convince them (Europeans) to acknowledge the unique knowledge and relationships that

Indigenous people derive from place and from their homeland. I think these two struggles are the greatest challenge to Indigenous peoples everywhere. When successfully managed, the greatest potential for transformation of education systems in the interests of all learners is far more likely to eventuate. As Battiste writes, “Every school is either a site of reproduction or a site of change—education can be liberating or it can domesticate and maintain domination” (p. 175).

The first part of the title to the book, “Decolonizing Education”, is a reminder of the way Indigenous peoples everywhere experienced what Kincheloe and Steinberg (1999, p. 82) refer to as subjugated knowledges. These are the excluded, silenced, or marginalized histories, memories and experiences of subordinated populations. Part of the solution to revitalizing subjugated knowledges came through critical pedagogy. This is a pedagogy that calls for learners to become active participants in the reconstruction and transformation of their own identities and histories.

The subtitle, “Nourishing the Learning Spirit”, can be related to the primary motivation for the renaissance created by the Māori, the Indigenous people of New Zealand: the revitalization of the Māori language. Sayings such as:

Toku reo, toku ohooho

My language is my awakening

Toku reo, taku māpihi maurea

My language is my base

Toku reo, toku whakakai marihi

My language is my focus

have been the inspiration or ego ideal that has been, and 30 years later still is, the driving force behind the decolonizing of the tangata whenua and the affirmation of what it means to be a Māori subject. Such concepts exist among all Indigenous peoples.

The Canadian writer Lopez (2001) talks about the concept of *isumataq*: “Once in a great while an *isumataq* becomes apparent, a person who can create the atmosphere in which wisdom shows itself ... It is a nameless wisdom esteemed by all people. It is understanding how to live a decent life, how to behave properly toward other people and toward the land” (p. 298).

The nourishing of the learning spirit, like the nourishing of the soul, occurs in community. This deep relational quality of all of reality, O’Sullivan (1999) reminds us, is referred to by Indigenous peoples as “all my relations”—our spirit is embedded in many levels of community (p. 261). Marie Battiste gives us a book that is comprehensive in its scope, with 10 chapters of tightly written prose extensively referenced and organized around relevant research. The book will be a welcome addition to all those who seek to provide the best education we can for all our learners.

*Education, indigenous knowledges, and development in the Global South: Contesting knowledges for a sustainable future.* Breidlid, Anders. (2013). New York, NY: Routledge. 244 pp. ISBN 13: 978-0-415-89589-7.

I was delighted to read Anders Breidlid’s *Education, Indigenous Knowledge, and Development in the Global South: Contesting Knowledges for a Sustainable Future*. It is a significant book for understanding the hegemonic role of Western epistemology that spread around the globe in the era of colonialism. This epistemology, through the capitalist economic system, worked to exclude and other all rival epistemologies in its path.

The book has eight chapters. Chapter 1 serves

## Glossary

tangata whenua     original people of the land

## References

- Kincheloe, J. L., & Steinberg, S. R. (1999). A tentative description of post-formal thinking: The critical confrontation with cognitive theory. In J. L. Kincheloe, S. R. Steinberg, & P. Hinchey (Eds.), *The post-formal reader: Cognition and education* (pp. 55–90). New York, NY: Falmer Press.
- Lopez, Barry. (2001). *Arctic dreams: Imagination and desire in a northern landscape*. London, England: Vintage.
- O’Sullivan, Edmund. (1999). *Transformative learning: Educational vision for the 21st century*. London, England: Zed Books.

## Review author

Wally Penetito, retired Professor of Māori Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Email: wally.penetito@vuw.ac.nz

as the introduction while Chapter 2 discusses Western hegemonic knowledge production and its othering of alternative knowledges. In Chapter 3, as well as discussing other issues, Breidlid describes the application of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to facilitate negotiation between Western and indigenous knowledge systems. Chapters 4–7 present CHAT case studies from five countries: South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Cuba and Chile. The discussions in these chapters focus

Copyright of *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* is the property of University of Auckland on behalf of Nga Pae o te Maramatanga and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.