The Alberta Journal of Educational Research *Vol. 53, No. 3, Fall 2007, 320-323*

Book Reviews

Curriculum as Cultural Practice: Postcolonial Imaginations. Yatta Kanu (Ed.). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2006, hardcover, 326 pages, ISBN 0-8020-9078-8.

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> Cultural knowledge, curriculum, and imagination co-construct one another as legitimate, coherent, "commonsense" knowledge in a complex process that is often unarticulated except in moments of crisis such as when change threatens or when public scrutiny intensifies. Of the three, imagination is the most important place to begin the reorganization of the social order. (Kanu, 2006, p. 7)

Kanu's compilation of essays entitled *Curriculum as Cultural Practice Postcolonial Imaginations*, written by prominent curriculum scholars, is a significant effort to reconceptualize current discourse about curriculum and its relationship with cultural practice. Curriculum reform and research are seen through the lens of a postcolonial perspective, as noted in the introduction. Kanu's main thesis asserts that the Western prejudice that lies at the core of almost all education systems that operate in the world today has permeated curriculum discourse and practice. This prejudice has been exposed by the postcolonial perspectives represented in this book, which strive to deconstruct and challenge Western European practices and philosophies in curriculum, including perspectives from autobiography, feminism, postmodernism, and phenomenology.

Renowned curriculum theorists propose innovative ideas that result in a critical discussion about bridging the gap between curriculum and cultural practice. Initiatives range from concepts such as hybridity, Third Space, hermeneutic pedagogy, and engaged differences to ecological diversity, transnationalism, and indigenous knowledges and spirituality (to name only a few). These suggestions by no means claim to be a complete representation of a heterogeneous field like postcolonial studies; however, they do suggest imaginative and innovative ways that change may occur.

Kanu's text offers 13 ideas that serve to contribute to and revitalize current curriculum discourses. They are presented by curriculum scholars who seek to envision, discuss, and theorize about the emerging and often contentious concept loosely known as the *postcolonial*. The term *postcolonial* denotes a multitude

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As a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education and an English language arts teacher of visible minority working in predominantly white contexts, Farha Shariff has a particular interest in questions of postcolonial curriculum and pedagogy raised in this text. I find this book compelling for scholars in academia and equally for educators in practice.

of diverse subject positions, experiences, and enterprises that pertain to the concept of the colony and independent statehood. As Kanu says, the diverse use of the term *postcolonial* has resulted in a laxity of meaning that has confounded many and has created considerable debate about its precise meaning. Postcolonial refers not only to the period after independence (the departure of the Euro-imperial powers from the territories occupied and colonized), but also the period before colonization, with the cultural productions and social formations of the precolonized society. Postcolonialism is also used as a framework for the study and analysis of the power relations that inscribe race, ethnicity, and cultural production and relations—including education and schooling—as hegemonic ideological apparatuses (Althusser, 1971).

Norrel London's chapter opens the dialogue by discussing the complex issues of how curriculum as cultural practice has worked for the benefit of the colonialists to the detriment of the colonies. By focusing on the late colonial period from 1938 to 1959, London comprehensively analyzes how education in Trinidad and Tobago was used as the medium for developing a required sense of psychological subordination in the colonized Other. He draws on the idea that "ideology became the primary agent for the internalization and acceptance of British and Western culture" (p. 9).

By tracing the history of how the English language became institutionalized in Trinidad and Tobago, London shows how the primacy assigned to English has had a huge effect on the education system and cultural practices. Despite having the opportunity to adopt other linguistic models, Trinidad and Tobago have retained the English language as their only official language. By uncovering the intellectual arguments that may have accorded primacy to English, London explains how formal schooling inculcated and imposed English. He uses a postcolonial lens to uncover how particular practices and techniques were used by managers in these colonies as a form of colonial statecraft in the institution of English.

In chapter two, "To STEAL or to TELL: Teaching English in the Global Era," Seonaigh MacPherson discusses the silencing of other languages in the colonial and postcolonial fervor to promote English as a global language. She expands on the idea that English continues to play a critical role in the current global era. MacPherson examines how postcolonial implications in education may promote global biolinguistic diversity and sustainability. She uses the term *Blue Planet*, a bio-ecological phenomenon, as she discusses the shift from the world as a colonial artifact to the world as the Blue Planet. She asserts that this image of the Blue Planet has become a dominant contemporary cosmological archetype, which has rapidly replaced our perceptions of the mapped, color-coded globe of the colonial world, thus marking a dramatic transformation from a colonial to a global world view.

As she ponders the question "Whatever happened to the postcolonial in-between?" MacPherson explores the importance of "the absence of a postcolonial period of transition in the shift from colonial English-language teaching in manifold forms and varieties of programs" (p. 18). MacPherson critically examines a number of contemporary programs and proposes a postcolonial plan for English-language education as being multilingual, multiliterate, intercultural, and grounded in biolinguistic diversity and ecological sustainability.

Willinsky's impressive chapter examines the crucial role schools play in directing progressive curriculum efforts toward understanding and critiquing what has come to dominate and extend the colonial influence of that time. This is a practical chapter for teachers. Willinsky narrates his experiences of developing a project with grade 12 students over three weeks in an English poetry class. During his time in the class, he worked with the students on creating a comprehensive alternative supplementary anthology of poetry that critiqued the British colonial themes and images that existed in the students' prescribed textbook. He proposes the idea of a postcolonial anthology of poems as a supplement to the usual canonized literary texts that teachers rely on. He points out that instead of trying to create a cultural revolution, creating a supplementary anthology to the traditional teaching materials increases the chances that it will be used by teachers to expand the education of students.

In her chapter, Ingrid Johnston considers the contestatory and hybrid nature of postcolonial literary studies in relation to the intellectual engagement and cultural negotiation of school reading practices and curriculum. She points out how reading practices in Canadian schools are rooted in intricate and inherited power relations, static notions of a "collective national identity," and self-perpetuating notions of canonicity. To demonstrate how challenging these notions are to deconstruct, she discusses a research project involving five student teachers as they attempt to bring postcolonial literature into the classroom.

Despite initial enthusiasm over the possibilities offered by postcolonial literature to engage with contemporary worldwide concerns, only one of the five student teachers who participated in the study had the confidence to attempt making any changes in the reading practices of her students. The other four participants' desire to effect curricular change was contradicted by their need to fit into the established culture of the school and their reliance on outdated curricular resources. Johnston's study highlights the complex challenges surrounding literature, school reading practices, and the canon.

David Smith and M. Kazim Bacchus respectively focus on teacher education and on locating postcolonial education in the debates and conversations about globalization. Each author proposes new modes of pedagogy and curriculum in the globalization debate. Smith's essay addresses postcolonialism as framed through the lens of globalization. For Smith the term is not new, but rather a term that has gained more momentum in response to a set of world conditions that found their genesis at the end of the Cold War. According to Smith, globalization is a form of "human imaginary that serves to organize and mobilize certain forms of action in particular ways and as factity that named the plans and intentions of the actors" (p. 22).

Smith proposes a hermeneutic pedagogy that requires teachers to be educated so as to be able to speak across disciplines, cultures, and national boundaries. It requires that we not receive education, but rather be open to education; continually being available to the means by which one can be led by life. Smith points out that a postcolonial hermeneutic requires that teachers be the interpreters of culture and curriculum as opposed to simply being transmitters and managers. He leaves his readers with a reminder to keep in mind "the underside of history," which requires us to keep the memory of colonialism

close. "To confront the lie of surface power will remind those who would willfully destroy life in the name of life that for a future to be possible the sins of the past must be remembered" (p. 258).

In his chapter entitled "The Impact of Globalization on Curriculum Development in Postcolonial Societies," Bacchus discusses a neoliberal version of globalization that affects the educational agenda. This affects particular policies for issues such as educational financing, curriculum, testing, and teacher education. He suggests that the economic and social survival of the former colonies, of which almost all are in developing countries, rests on curricular and educational changes and the growing importance of the knowledge economy in the realignment of global capital.

Other authors address curriculum questions through a variety of lenses. Ralph T. Mason discusses questions pertaining to a postcolonial mathematics curriculum for the Aboriginal population of Nunavut in northern Canada. Teachers in this region are invited to question their current teaching practices, which are based on traditional Western mathematics. George Dei and Stanley Doyle-Wood, Kincheloe, Kanu, and Aikenhead respectively consider the recently emerging notion of indigenous knowledges and spirituality as transformative counterhegemonic knowledge and as a source of embodied resistance to Cartesian rationalism by which the West measures and validates knowledge. George Richardson's chapter on reimagining the curriculum as a third space, along with Kara McDonald's chapter on the concept of nation, are of particular importance given the recent changes to the Alberta social studies curriculum. Both chapters address questions about the viability of the concept of nation and nationalism in postcolonial times, considering important questions for teaching and learning about citizenship and national identity in the social studies classroom. Together these authors enrich our understanding of curriculum studies through postcolonial eyes.

To conclude this review, I comment on the important contribution this book has made in attempting to close the gap between the theory-practice split that is so prevalent in academic discussions about the postcolonial. I found this book very helpful in *seeing* how the present curriculum's history has been based on colonial influence. The theorists' contributions to this book give careful and vital consideration to the discussion of the reconceptualization of current curriculum and practice. By addressing some of the ambiguities associated with the term *postcolonial*, Kanu provides a fairly balanced assessment that clearly indicates the range of ideas and concepts expressed by the diverse range of curriculum theorists. Her goal seems to problematize the issues surrounding curriculum, imagination, and the postcolonial rather than to simplify readers' understanding of what constitutes diversity in education. This book is an excellent introduction for those unfamiliar with postcolonial theory. Even if readers do not fully agree with some of the ideas and issues proposed in this anthology, Kanu disturbs the comfort zone we all slip into and forces us to reexamine current teaching practice critically in the age of the Blue Planet. It is impossible to continue thinking in the same vein about postcolonialism and teaching after reading this text.

Reference

Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.