

Book Review

Leading and Managing Indigenous Education in the Postcolonial World

Zane Ma Rhea

London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015

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In *Leading and Managing Indigenous Education in the Postcolonial World*, Zane Ma Rhea (2015) critically discusses educational leadership, educational management, and Indigenous education in the postcolonial world. The purpose of this book is to provide a critical, multiperspectival, and system level analysis of education services to Indigenous people by drawing attention to these academic fields in postcolonial Australia. In the multiperspectival approach, Ma Rhea provides in detail how and where these changes need to take place to engage Indigenous people in education. In system level analysis, Ma Rhea argues that mainstream education systems in Australia require changes need to be made at all levels to support Indigenous education. She critically analyses international Indigenous rights, social exchange, and complex adaptive system theories and highlights the Australian context. The author describes partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as social exchanges. With complex adaptive theory, the scholar explains how present education systems in Australia fail to engage Indigenous people because of colonial practice and power that exist in postcolonial Australia. She brings these theories into her discussion to argue that administrators, leaders, and managers of Indigenous education initiatives need to enhance their understanding of an Indigenist perspective. Ma Rhea emphasizes the rights-based approach in Indigenous education as a means of recognizing and honouring Indigenous people's economic, linguistic, and cultural rights in the postcolonial education system.

There are five parts with 11 chapters in this book. However, my review does not follow a linear examination of each chapter. Rather, I provide a brief summary, explore key concepts, and critically examine the implications. I also state why this book is important for anyone interested in Indigenous education, and identify the shortfalls of the text.

Summary

This book addresses issues of leadership and management in Indigenous education within the postcolonial world context. The discussions in this text urge education administrators, leaders, and managers to rethink leadership and management of Indigenous education in terms of conceptualization and practice. Non-Indigenous administrators and leaders often struggle to find meaningful ways in which to educate Indigenous children. Therefore, they reapply colonial notions to solve problems arising in teaching Indigenous children. Ma Rhea claims that these administrators do not include Indigenous people in the managing and leading process in the

education system. According to Ma Rhea, non-Indigenous administrators give the same colonial logic that Indigenous people do not belong and keep Indigenous people outside the education system. Indigenous perspectives are not included and Indigenous participation is not valued in the education systems in a global context. As a result, non-Indigenous administrators have failed to build an Indigenous education system that addresses Indigenous rights. In other words, internationally, the present education system is complicated and unfit to create an eagerness among Indigenous people to send their children into the mainstream education systems that are publically funded.

Ma Rhea acknowledges the fact that there is no simple solution that can apply in the mainstream education system that would make it suitable for Indigenous people. She explains a root cause of this problem is the colonial past of Indigenous people in Australia. The colonial past of Indigenous people is a history of cruelty and injustice. European colonizers deprived Indigenous people of their rights of language, land, culture, and education for a long time. A legacy of mistrust has grown among Indigenous people. The mainstream education system still maintains its colonial legacy and does not address and value Indigenous histories, languages, and cultures. Ma Rhea is right that it is difficult for Indigenous people to trust non-Indigenous administrators, leaders, managers, and teachers in education systems. The reason for this mistrust is that ethnocentric bias exists in the postcolonial world.

Ma Rhea advocates three approaches to solve the problems that exist in the provision of education services to Indigenous children. According to her, the three approaches are: the creation of partnerships, the recognition of the rights of Indigenous people in these partnerships, and the development of a workforce comprised of non-Indigenous educational administrators and leaders. The first approach entails the building of partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Ma Rhea cites the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2008) and emphasizes the recognition of the rights of Indigenous people in the partnerships. In the second approach, she argues that the recognition of the rights of Indigenous people will reshape educational services. She further suggests that strategic changes need to be introduced in order to achieve this goal. For example, strategic changes can be integrated in the roles of classroom teachers and their professional development needs with respect to Indigenous education and Indigenous studies. The third approach underlines workforce development of non-Indigenous administrators and leaders that will lead to this strategic change in education management. Ma Rhea recommends applying these three approaches together in education services. These three approaches, she contends, will help non-Indigenous educational administrators, leaders, and managers identify how the current education system has failed Indigenous children. On the other hand, Ma Rhea warns, the partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is not a mode to break the colonial legacy. Towards this end, she encourages a paradigmatic change from a colonialist perspective to an Indigenist and rights-based perspective as a way of shifting the colonial legacy. Ma Rhea is an Indigenous scholar and her experiences in Indigenous education and Indigenous leadership development equip her with valuable insights in this area. Consequently, this Indigenous scholar uses her understanding, knowledge, experience, and skill in her book to develop an educational system for Indigenous children so that their needs can be fulfilled.

Contributions

The book makes a significant contribution to the comprehension of the Indigenous education

system in the postcolonial world in a global context. The author, Ma Rhea sets out to offer an in-depth understanding of the failure of the mainstream education system in Australia and to provide an extensive analysis of development of an education system that benefits Indigenous children. My doctoral research investigates English language policy and planning within a postcolonial context and significantly informs my understanding and appreciation for this book. From my point of view, this book is a guide for developing Indigenous education in the postcolonial world where effects of European or British colonization still exist.

This book discusses the concept of partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are school leaders, educators, education policy makers, and educational administrators. However, the main objective of this book is to problematize the partnerships as they currently stand. Ma Rhea says these problematic partnership are, in essence, “infantilising Indigenous communities” (p. 4) with an old colonial logic that Indigenous people are incompetent and occupy deficit positions. This book contributes to an awareness of these problematic partnerships. In addition, the author also asserts that governments in postcolonial countries should prevent this infantilising of Indigenous people and help them to reclaim their rights to educate their children.

The arguments presented in this book develop an understanding of a necessary approach to partnerships between Indigenous people and their local school communities and administrative services. Ideally, two-way partnerships should involve Indigenous people in the leadership and management levels in an education system for education of Indigenous children. The involvement of Indigenous people in an education system can ensure a teaching and learning environment where Indigenous children can learn about Indigenous histories, languages, and cultures.

This book clearly distinguishes between a colonial educational administrative approach and an Indigenist and right-based approach in the postcolonial education system. Non-Indigenous people govern the colonial administrative approach. In contrast, the Indigenist and rights-based approach ensures equal partnerships between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. The analysis in this book develops an argument to move from the colonial administrative approach to the Indigenist and rights-based approach as a viable means of leading and managing an education system for Indigenous children. A very important goal of this book is to provide a framework for educational policy makers to ensure the rights of Indigenous people in the education systems.

Shortcomings

Ma Rhea’s work is well-written and provides a critical framework for Indigenous education in Australia. However, this book can be challenging to read. Throughout my reading journey, I have felt that a reader of this book must have background knowledge about Indigenous education and the postcolonial world. The book also requires an academic ability to understand the critical analysis and arguments.

I understand that this book targets a specific academic audience, as it uses much academic jargon. Yet, in my opinion, this style makes the prose very dry and breaks concentration during reading. However, I acknowledge this book enriches knowledge about Indigenous education systems and the postcolonial world.

Target Audience

As I mentioned in the previous section, the book's target audience is specific. From a postcolonial context, all postcolonial countries can use this book as a framework for foundational development of authentic Indigenous education systems. In addition, this book is a valuable resource to researchers and postgraduate students whose research is on Indigenous education. Furthermore, teachers, educational administrators and leaders, Indigenous education specialists, and education policy makers will also benefit from this book since it provides a framework for Indigenous education in postcolonial countries.

Conclusion

In sum, Ma Rhea develops an argument to use the Indigenist and rights-based approach in education. The author suggests that education systems in postcolonial countries need to respect and understand the different views of educational administrators, leaders, and managers who work in Indigenous education systems. In addition, this book carries significant implications in many ways. The author identifies the colonial legacy that is colonial practice and power, problematizes the concept of partnerships, and makes a framework for Indigenous education. This book requires specialized knowledge to rethink Indigenous education from a postcolonial perspective. To conclude, this book is a valuable addition to the studies of Indigenous education in the postcolonial world where colonial practice and power still play major roles in education systems.

References

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- United Nations. (2008). *United Nations' declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: Author.

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