

epistemological direction, which the editors argue is necessary in order to solidify the premise that elements of indigeneity exist in all cultures.

The final section of the text amounts to the largest grouping of essays. 'Hand: Human Ecology in Practice' offers readers a broad range of specific cases of Human Ecology at work through nine exemplars. Examples of theory into practice: each essay in this part of the text maintains an autobiographical voice to share specific experiences and examples that reference the diversity of Human Ecology pursuits. The editors of this text believe that indigeneity offers Human Ecology a framework for the future of the discipline. Yet, many indigenous researchers straddle the borders and boundaries of academia, keenly aware that their research does not fit neatly into any single discipline. The holistic nature of such studies often demands that we sit outside the confines of Western-style silos of academia, yet this also allows us to more easily access directions of inquiry from a variety of disciplines. Indigenous researchers, especially those working within the area of educational research, have long embraced indigenous epistemologies, autobiographical, and narrative methodologies that mesh

with traditional ways of knowing and learning. *Radical Human Ecology* clearly celebrates the complexity and diversity of the varied research it assembles in making a contribution to the literature. While one strength of this text lies in its acknowledgement of the importance and application of indigenous ontologies and epistemologies to academic inquiry, its weakness lies in its effort, mostly early on in the text, to maintain links to the established scientific discipline of Human Ecology rather than moving on. Researchers from all disciplines should embrace the advice of contributor Makere Stewart-Harawira, who asks readers to take the 'next great evolutionary leap forward' (p. 85) in considering ways of thinking and researching that embrace empathic and hopeful human relationships to both the sacred and the earth.

Reference

Gunderson, L., & Holling, C.S. (Eds.), (2001). *Panarchy: Understanding transformation in human and natural systems*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education

Quentin Beresford, Gary Partington and Graeme Gower (Editors) *University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 2012, Second Edition, ISBN 9781742583891*

Reviewed by Neil Harrison, Department of Education, Macquarie University, Australia.

Email: neil.harrison@mq.edu.au

doi 10.1017/jie.2013.4

Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education provides a highly accessible review of current approaches and agendas in Aboriginal education. Its accessibility means that it will have extensive appeal to pre-service teachers. The text is indeed aimed at teachers, educational administrators and policy-makers, with the objective of developing best practice in the field. It is the second edition of a text that was first published in 2003.

The first chapter should be compulsory reading for pre-service teachers across Australia. It documents the experiences of a beginning teacher, Helen McCarthy, on Anindilyakwa country in the Northern Territory, where she lived and worked as a teacher for 12 years. It is beautifully written; the suspense and intrigue associated with the experiences that Helen relates through the privilege of living in an Aboriginal community are a delight to read. After reading a chapter like this, I was left wondering why a young beginning teacher would consider the monotony of a city placement.

Beresford and Gray present an invaluable overview of Aboriginal policy development in Australia. The various

models presented will provide the student reader with a method of interpreting previous government approaches to Aboriginal education, and the ways in which policy development so easily returns to where it began 30 years before, with only slight adjustments to the original model. Indeed, the authors reveal how we have returned to compensatory education. They include the government's *Closing the Gap* policy and Noel Pearson's interpretation of *Direct Instruction* in a compensatory skills model of education. I was also interested by a note from the authors that 9% of Indigenous students do not sit the NAPLAN tests.

Issues of standardising Aboriginal student outcomes against the national benchmark of non-Aboriginal students, and governing by numbers are not explored. Chapter 5 starts with a restrained letter from a mother who is writing to her son's teacher requesting that the teacher 'think carefully about 'how and why you read a Dreaming story to the children ... and why you must ensure it doesn't become a token effort'. This is a pertinent observation of widespread practice, where so many children

across Australia are reading Dreaming stories, and until recently were using Dreaming stories to practise narrative text for the Year 3 NAPLAN. So many pre-service teachers assume that they can unproblematically teach narrative text through these stories, yet they do not understand the concept of Dreaming themselves, or know how they might explain such a concept to their children. This mother's letter simply asks the teacher to think carefully before reading Dreaming stories to children. At a time when there is so much pressure on pre-service teachers (and lecturers in teacher education) to get the methodology right, and to pay less attention to the so-called theory, this mother's letter (and the chapter) serves as a sobering reminder of the need to attend to the *why*, as well as the what and how: Should non-Aboriginal teachers be teaching a concept they do not understand?

The recognition that most Indigenous students in Australia speak another language or dialect other than Standard English is the focus of Chapter 6. There is a particularly interesting section on 'Broadcast vs Dyadic speech' for those involved in teacher education. The authors (Grote and Rochecouste) highlight the importance of recognising the differences between these two styles of communication, differences that can easily lead some teachers to thinking that the child is not paying attention because he or she is not looking. As a basic starting point for the lesson, most teachers will expect the student to be looking at them when they are talking and giving instructions. There is a basic tenet in education; never start the lesson until all students are looking towards the teacher. A pre-service teacher will normally assume that if students are not looking at him or her, then they are not listening. This chapter reveals that such tenets are not always true, that some Aboriginal students do not have to be looking at the teacher to be listening. It is the teacher's responsibility here to observe the most appropriate response in a classroom setting.

There are some interesting figures on Health in Chapter 7. For example, in 2006, half of all Indigenous people were aged 21 or under, and almost 40% of Indigenous people are under 15 years of age. There are also figures on the median age of Indigenous mothers, and on the widespread effects of ear infections and otitis media. This chapter on school attendance makes explicit that teachers are often the first non-Aboriginal people that Aboriginal children come into close and regular contact with (p. 294). Teachers are required to induct these children into the expectations and culture of the school, and hence a Cultural Competency Framework is explicated in the final chapters.

Gray and Partington state that 'despite increased enrolments, Aboriginal retention and participation rates are falling' (p. 302). Moreover, 'fewer than 20 per cent of Aboriginal students meet the reading standards and only 30 per cent meet the writing standards' (p. 302). The statistics are summarised later by Craven in her chapter on 'Seeding Success', that there were 'no significant changes for Indigenous students in national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy between 1999 and 2007 across years 3, 5 and 7' (page 344). Has anything changed?

The final chapters are devoted to searching for ways to explain the lack of outcomes in Aboriginal education. The factors inhibiting change are listed as dispossession, loss of language and culture, loss of power (and being forced off traditional lands to live on reserves and missions), poverty, racism and poor health. It is also suggested that 'schools that are making a difference for Aboriginal students are focusing on effective teaching and learning rather than student welfare programs' (p. 301). A variety of programs are documented as 'seeding success'. Craven highlights the admission that 'a good teacher is someone who likes us and is fair' (p. 345). Of course, this was recognised many years ago, but is often forgotten in the push to demonstrate success through numbers.

This text consistently questions the validity of treating literacy in schools as an individual pursuit. The work on language as a social construction over the past 25 years highlights as illusory, our prior assumptions about meaning coming from a book, or from cognition (the child's mind). And yet our policy-makers and legislation continue to lead practitioners back to such an illusion. Schools continue to teach reading and its construction of meaning as an individual task, and to assess on this basis. However, a careful description (the final chapter) of how a teaching sequence in Accelerated Literacy unfolds in the classroom will assist in reconceptualising colonial approaches to teaching reading in schools.

Partington and Beresford conclude their chapter on the 'Contexts of Aboriginal Education' with an overview from the famous linguist, Jim Cummins. Cummins argues that 'school failure does not widely occur in minority groups which are positively oriented towards their own and the dominant culture' (p. 84). This is just as true today as it was in 1986 when he first wrote his paper for *Harvard Educational Review*. Cummins argued that teachers have a powerful role to play in turning history around. As editors and writers of *Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education*, Partington, Beresford and Gower imply that teachers are yet to apply themselves to this challenge.