

BOOK REVIEWS

Sociocultural realities: exploring new horizons, by Angus Macfarlane, Sonja Macfarlane and Melinda Webber, Christchurch, New Zealand, Canterbury University Press, 2015, 220 pp., \$45 (softcover), ISBN 9781927145722

The current global educational landscape is complex and multi-faceted in nature. This volume seeks to demonstrate this complexity by presenting insights into various educational contexts (early years to tertiary) when positioned and viewed through a sociocultural perspective. In doing so, this book makes an important contribution to the dialogue on indigenous education, marginalization, minoritization, and working in socially just ways, championing the notion of partnership, along with illuminating the social and cultural discourses of teaching and learning. Amongst other fields, this book will be extremely useful to all of those working in education, cultural and indigenous studies, be they educational practitioners, policy-makers, students or academic researchers. It will no doubt support the development of sociocultural consciousness, an element argued across the book as critical for those engaging in educative processes.

The title of this book signals a shift in perspective with regard to sociocultural realities and the ways in which they are encountered by various groups in society. With the subtitle of *exploring new horizons*, it is no surprise that each contributor in this book provides critical insight and works with provocative purpose and insight to stir a sense of activism and professional reflection amongst its readership.

This book draws together 12 chapters, each located across developmentally positioned educational contexts. As a way of setting the scene, the first chapter adopts an inclusive and encompassing perspective on the historical nature of sociocultural theory. Macfarlane succinctly weaves the historical discourses and cultural nuances of relevant educational theories together, and in doing so, illustrates the shortfalls and lack of recognition of indigenous theorists within these much-revered historical storylines. Presenting a model which draws together social and cultural constructs, he illustrates how these aspects are inextricably linked and, when they converge, and sense-making processes occur, how they generate sociocultural realities founded on lived experiences and learned behaviours.

Initial chapters draw marginalized contexts and diverse student groups to the centre of the book's focus. Useful metaphors are drawn upon to illustrate the possibilities for partnership through the interconnection and interaction between Western ideologies and indigenous scholarship. The presentation and critical examination of underserved populations (for example, the nature of assessment for students with special education needs by chapter authors Guerin and Morton) challenge traditional discourses and through each chapter highlight the role of sociocultural approaches in repositioning students in the teaching and learning relationship and reshaping curriculum construction, and in pedagogical approaches.

This book provides opportunities to re-examine socioculturalism through combining theory and practice, informed by rich research encounters in a broad array of educational contexts. Each chapter cleverly segues into the next, shifting the horizon and focus to a new and often unique developmental context and perspective. An excellent example of this is the scholarship of Peters and Paki, which highlights the cultural diversity within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) context in Aotearoa, New Zealand and examines locations of power and knowledge,

arguing for “attunement” to children’s experiences and for diversity to be recognized so individual worldviews can be respected. Though not new in ideology, the evidenced and suggested practices and implications for teachers are insightful, respectful and well placed.

Providing critical insights into ways in which the dynamic relationship between indigenous knowledge, kaupapa Maori research and sociocultural theory can lead to contextually and culturally responsive practices becomes the core business of the chapters that follow. This gives the book a profound intent in calling the marginalized and minoritized to the centre of each educational context, recognizing the tensions and illuminating ways for championing the individual human experience *within* relationships.

This book has significant strengths, many of which are located in the strong theoretical arguments, empirical research base and contextually located research contributions that provide rich narratives to support theorizing. The strong concluding chapter gently encourages the reader to reflect and expand their ideas. All carve space for new ways of conceptualizing sociocultural theorizing within educational contexts.

The importance of partnership, participation and recognizing and protecting diversity are pronounced as this book’s core emphasis. This is truly evidenced throughout. Rather than deficit theorizing, the work in this book eloquently calls the reader to lift their eyes off the page and towards new horizons – to reimagine the possible when conscious of culture, context, individual and community, arguing, only then, that sociocultural theorizing has a place and can respond to the divergent and complex cultural make up within educational communities.

Rachel McNae

Director of the Centre for Educational Leadership Research, Te Whiringa – School of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice, Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, Aotearoa, New Zealand

 r.mcnae@waikato.ac.nz

© 2016 Rachel McNae

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1249714>