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Review of *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education* by Four Arrows (D. T. Jacobs), K. England-Aytes, G. Cajete, M. R. Fisher, B. A. Mann, B. A., E. McGaa, & M. Sorensen

Comments

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Four Arrows (Jacobs, D. T.), England-Aytes, K., Cajete, G., Fisher, M., R., Mann, B. A., MCGAA, E., Sorensen, M. (2013). *Teaching truly: A curriculum to indigenize mainstream education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

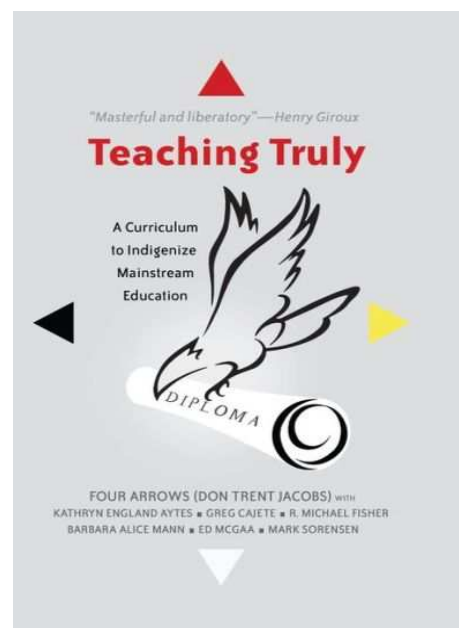
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Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education is a powerful book in its purpose and strategic aim towards transforming our educational system. This book dives deep into a holistic worldview—one that reflects an Indigenous paradigm—and challenges the purpose behind schooling within the Americas. At the epicenter of what many educators would call a failing and outdated educational system, here in the U.S. there is a Eurocentric ideal in line with a specific economic model whose purpose directly conflicts with the principles, values, and historical narratives of the Native Peoples of these lands. Four Arrows' cultural and academic work, together with several guest authors, strive to reposition an Indigenous approach to education, based upon the ideas of reconnecting with our humanity through balance, an established relationship with nature, a respect toward culture, an embrace of community, and love as way of living (Four Arrows, 2013, p. 65).

The structural layout and curricular depth embedded within *Teaching Truly*, embrace an Indigenous framework not just in words, but also in practice. The book is organized to honor the four directions, respecting and



weaving in the deep knowledge that the Medicine Wheel and Sacred Hoop represent. The books' structural layout and curricular intention engage the reader holistically, weaving in collective and Indigenous knowledge into forms of practice that can be used both in life and in the classroom. The four sections of the book clearly describe the four areas of growth when looking toward self-development. The four areas of growth are represented by four colors and four themes.

The first section, referring to the West, represented by the color black on the Medicine Wheel, symbolizes introspection and allows for the reader to engage in critical reflection regarding the current conditions of Indigenous peoples. This section describes the role of hegemony and the effect that anti-Indianism has played throughout westernized history. Guest author Kathryn England-Aytes, of Cherokee descendants, establishes this first and most critical part of the book, introducing the current and historical trauma Indigenous communities have had to endure. She also offers strategies and approaches for how to prevent such trauma within the classroom (Four Arrows, 2013, p. 19). The second section of the book, referencing the North, is characterized by the color red and represents wisdom. This part of the book looks to the work being done at STAR (Service To All Relations) a Navajo School Model. Guest author Mark Sorenson, demonstrates how educators at the Navajo school are able to integrate the state standards of Arizona into the STAR Indigenous curriculum. Given that Arizona is one of the most conservative states in the nation, laws such as HB 2281 coming out of Arizona legislature, demonstrate the impact of the political climate on schools and teachers. HB2281, prohibiting ethnic studies, has made it difficult for educators to teach Indigenous perspectives, consequently highlighting the challenges and struggles within mainstream education (HB2281, 2010). Mark Sorenson further highlights practices for non-Indian and Indian educators looking to include an Indigenous perspective into their curriculum and instructional practices (Four Arrows, 2013, p. 51).

The third section embodying the East, and designated as the color yellow represents energy and action. Here Four Arrows exposes the dominant and hegemonic approach to mainstream education. This area of the book looks toward dismantling and critically assessing the subjects taught and learned within schools. The subjects explored within this section include English Language Arts,

Mathematics, Economics, Geography, US History authored by Barbara Alice Mann, and Science authored by Greg Cajete. Here the authors engage in this analysis with a curricular purpose in mind, to conceptualize mainstream education from an indigenous perspective while at the same time giving educators hands-on materials that could be used in the classroom. Each subject matter is dissected and deconstructed so that a dominant and mainstream education can be critiqued while an indigenous perspective could be made present within the classroom.

Four Arrows proposes that each subject matter be broken up into 4 subsections that best reflect a critical, and Indigenous worldview to teaching. First, each subject matter is analyzed by looking to the corporate and hegemonic influences imposed onto education. Within this part of the lesson plan, normative and official scholarship is questioned and critiqued, describing the potential opportunity for students to look at their own subject matter and give voice to the unofficial story often untold within mainstream education. Second, the notion of real-world outcomes are examined which would allow for students to use their own experiences and the environment around them as a way to develop their own critique regarding the studied subject matter. Third, the subject matter is framed within an Indigenous perspective, fostering an environment where students can learn from Indigenous values, principles, and ideals. Lastly, the subject matter should allow the opportunity for teachers, in collaboration with students, to design questions for research, and dialogue, while exploring choices and the implementation of praxis. This deconstruction and reconstruction of the subject matter taught within mainstream education attempts to bring forth an Indigenous context and history suppressed by westernized approaches to education (Four Arrows, 2013, p. 85).

The fourth section, as demonstrated by the color white, represents spiritual and emotional awareness and looks to the relationship between spirituality and psychology. Four Arrows together with guest authors Wanblee Wichasha (Eagle Man) a.k.a Ed McGaa and R. Michael Fisher elaborate on indigenous spirituality and the importance of fearlessness. Four Arrows further contests the belief that only Indians are allowed and or capable of teaching Indigenous knowledge. He reflects on the tensions, disagreements, and encounters regarding non-Indigenous educators and their use of an indigenous

curriculum, yet also proposes that such struggles must be overcome if we are to move toward a more Indigenous worldview within education. Four Arrows points toward bettering ourselves and overcoming fear as a way to get past the divides and struggles imposed by hegemonic ideals. The proposal as suggested by Four Arrows is no easy task, as what is being asked is a long-term process of decolonization and humanization. This self-work is one I agree must be done, and yet I recognize this internal process as difficult, as it reflects a long history of oppression and injustice (Four Arrows, 2013 p. 237).

The book's proposal to indigenize mainstream education through curriculum-based approaches comes at a pressing time, politically, culturally, and socially. Currently across the United States, Ethnic Studies disciplines are being challenged on many fronts, from budgetary issues engaged with the politics of recognition and what priorities are valued and funded, to overtly racialized concerns accusing programs and departments as being one-sided, Anti-American and critical of U.S. history (HB2281, 2010). As a witness to such a sweeping theme across the country, it is alarming to see the deliberate disregard of herstories, histories, and narratives of Indigenous and immigrant peoples of this land. The increasingly diverse demographics of the nation can no longer submit to old paradigms and Eurocentric views of the past and present. Equity, recognition, and self-reflection must be key ingredients if we are to move toward a just and inclusive educational system (Acosta & Mir, 2012, p. 20). *Teaching Truly* embraces this struggle and provides us the tools for such a move.

Pressing political times around the country require educators to think critically and take action around whose education is being valued and respected. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison and at Indiana University for example, Ethnic Studies departments and programs are currently being pushed to consolidate into a generalized department focused on race and identity as umbrella themes. Equally at both universities, budgetary concerns are given as reasoning for the consolidation, yet no acknowledgement is being given to the importance of their historical legacies and the racialized impact that such consolidation can imply. Specifically, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, multiple departments are being pushed to dismantle themselves and in turn are offered an incentive-based structure that would position each ethnic

studies program in competition with one another. Nothing is being done to recognize the contributions that each Ethnic Studies discipline has given the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and nothing is being done to recognize their respective political and cultural autonomy. Students and faculty at UW-Madison are engaged in a struggle to stop the ethnic studies consolidation, where many continue to mobilize and open up dialogues as a way to oppose the forced consolidation. Many students and faculty alike understand the consolidation to be ghettoizing, a denial of autonomy, and a direct violation of collective memory at UW-Madison (Rodriguez, Regeneracion, 2014 p. 3, p.10).

Another example of how hegemony imposes westernized ideals and delegitimizes indigenous values, ideals, and forms of education, is described below by the Ethnic Studies Ban HB 2281. In Tucson, AZ., an Ethnic Studies Ban, HB 2281 was designed to dismantle the award winning Mexican American Raza Studies program (MAS) in the Tucson Unified School District. This program was unique and high achieving, producing high-test scores, high graduation rates, and successfully met the state educational standards of Arizona. The only critique of the program by state officials was that it taught from a critical worldview, allowing students to be critical of materials outlined by the state standards (Cambium Learning, 2011, p. 11). Consequently, we should take into consideration what Four Arrows clearly lays out in his book, that students and teachers should embrace an Indigenous perspective and strive to learn literature and history critical of mainstream education. Although laws and standards that intentionally reflect dominant hegemony, such as those in Arizona attempt to discredit indigenous values and principles, it is important to continue to develop ways that teaching and curriculum actively challenge the status quo. If we are to move to a more equitable place within our educational system, we must push to indigenize mainstream education, even if it means politically and culturally confronting and challenging the state. The Tucson example is a practical example of when Indigenous-based curriculums and perspectives engage a dominant hegemony (Romero, Arce, Cammarota, 2009, p.231). *Teaching Truly* addresses and highlights how hegemonic views to education shadow and devalue histories and narratives not in line with the dominant perspective. *Teaching Truly* proposes that students and teachers engage in highlighting the histories

and herstories often devalued by mainstream education. Tucson's collective political, cultural, and social push back by students and teachers demonstrate what Four Arrows is trying to describe in his book.

Four Arrows' work amplifies and gives context to the role that education is capable of serving. On the one-hand, education within the U.S. serves to reproduce the status quo, protecting the needs of the state and those in power. On the other hand education can serve to provide spaces for resistance, pushback, dignity, and autonomy. Ethnic studies as a discipline, and its direct influence from the Civil Rights Movement, are clear examples for how education is able to push back on the status quo creating equitable conditions for all. Nevertheless, education in the U.S. is one that is complex, often seen and promoted as a means for economic and social mobility. The nation's educational standards consistently reinforce and maintain a specific status quo as defined by western Eurocentric ideals, values and principles (Apple et al., 2009, p. 111). Where then, do the Indigenous ideals, values and principles fit when the state is conceptualizing inclusive education for all? Four Arrows answers this question as direct as possible.

The secret of American Schooling is that it doesn't teach the way children learn – nor is it supposed to. Schools were conceived to serve the economy and the social order rather than kids and families... (Four Arrows, 2013, p. 155)

This quotation by Four Arrows points toward the politics of knowledge directly describing whose knowledge is valued and whose knowledge is not. *Teaching Truly* gets to the foundation of what is wrong with our educational system and how as educators we should strive to make it equitable. Many students have been pushed to failure by the educational system, as these students do not see themselves reflected within the curriculum, often losing hope and abandoning the idea of higher education as a real life choice (Palos, 2011). Where do we go from here? How can we move away from binary thinking, and move towards embracing a more holistic approach of inclusion of multiple realities and perspectives within our educational system?

Four Arrows describes a new understanding and way of thinking about education, as he proposes an Indigenous perspective in accordance to nature and balance. He encourages society to accept spectrums in the

same way that nature designs them. As an example Four Arrows points to how the sun's light gradually fades away and is slowly replaced by the moon's light, and likewise the moon's light is gradually replaced in return by the sun's light. This constant balance and spectrum of light completes a full 24-hour cycle where every single minute and spectrum of light is appreciated and recognized. This metaphor augments how we often intentionally and unintentionally engage in binaries. Our relationship to the sun and the moon is often simplified to the notion of day and night, as if the sun and the moon were never connected in more intricate ways (Four Arrows, 2013, p. 67). Four Arrows proposes that we engage in thinking about topics within spectrums instead of such binaries, specifically when looking towards justice, equity and inclusion within our schools. He highlights the fact that spectrums validate all that is within it, without engaging in the power differential of what knowledge and worldview is superior. *Teaching Truly* has real potential for embracing all walks of life, multiple ideals and realities.

Teaching Truly is eye opening and vital for all educators engaged in education. This book reflects the needs and ideological limitations of our current educational system, yet also provides practical ways of embracing an Indigenous perspective to truly transform the way our schools operate. Four Arrows and his collaborating authors successfully and accurately address the political, economic, social, and cultural realities of our educational system. They actively engage in a counter-hegemonic project that is necessary, just, powerful and most importantly, revolutionary.

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About the Reviewer


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Jorge F. Rodriguez is a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction within the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His interests include the defense of public education, the politics of knowledge regarding whose knowledge is considered official and whose knowledge is considered unofficial. He is preoccupied with understanding the role and constant shifting relationship between hegemony, ideology and culture and its influence within our schools. Jorge comes from a strong activist background, and is passionate about creating spaces for youth and students in higher education around social justice, self-determination, and cultural resistance. He is specifically interested in unofficial knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, immigrant-based politics and the organic intellectual. Jorge considers himself as a scholar activist, constantly looking for ways to interrupt the status quo.

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