

Educational research practice in Southern contexts: recentring, reframing and reimagining methodological canons

edited by Sharlene Swartz, Nidhi Singal and Madeleine Arnot, Oxon, Routledge, 2024, 359pp., £35.69 (paperback) and available Open Access, ISBN 9781003355397

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BOOK REVIEW

Educational research practice in Southern contexts: recentring, reframing and reimagining methodological canons, edited by Sharlene Swartz, Nidhi Singal and Madeleine Arnot, Oxon, Routledge, 2024, 359pp., £35.69 (paperback) and available Open Access, ISBN 9781003355397

Opening with a sketch of the rather tense landscape of contemporary educational scholarship, Swartz, Singal, and Arnot, present a pressing aim to “open up the debate about ‘what works’ when researching Southern contexts” (p. 1). The editors’ deep reflection on this challenge impressively highlights their focus not just on the level of method, as so many edited volumes on research methods do; this itself revealing the effects of coloniality, which has sheared critical imaginaries from the production of knowledge fuelled by the “cognitive perspective of Eurocentrism” and a “growing technocritization” of knowledge production (Quijano, 2002). Instead, the focus goes deeper to encompass ontological and epistemological concerns, prior to “learning about first-hand experience of conducting research in such [Southern] contexts” to “recognise different cultural ways of *being, knowing, and doing*” (p. 1; original emphases), that lie outside the dominant Northern Anglophone systems of understanding, which have been deeply imbricated in domination and violence. Subsequently, the organisation and structure of this book is harmonious to the editors’ overarching goals and encourages the reader to engage with a diverse, robust and situationally rich volume of scholarship, taking them through themes of *Centring, Reframing* and *Reimagining* approaches to educational research, informed by postcolonial and decolonial perspectives.

Section 1: *Centring Southern experiences of education, knowledge and power* addresses the challenge of rethinking core areas of educational research within postcolonial imaginaries. The chapters challenge mainstream “scientific” approaches, typical of Western-centric scholarship, that typically silence the coterminous relationship of capitalism/modernity and coloniality (Mignolo & Bussmann, 2023), across areas such as research ethics (Tikly and Bond), disabilities (Singhal), gender (Fennell and Arnot), race (Safa Dei) and culture (Sauter and del Mar del Pozo), and reinvigorate the anti-colonial and indigenous epistemologies and praxis to transgress their boundaries. Section 2: *Reframing the codes, rules and rituals of educational practice*, presents a series of works interrogating the diverse codes and performativities of the research process, as implicated within the broader politics of knowledge construction, including calls to abandon the superficial narcissism of mainstream approaches to reflexivity in qualitative methods (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay). Contributors also tackle the existential and methodological challenges of researching in non-western contexts (Katyal and King). Further works reflect on cultivating relationships at the centre of a spiritual black feminist study (Morton) and a contribution from a graduate study experience on the vicissitudes of carrying out research as a Southern scholar educated in a Western institution (Hamid). A further chapter challenges the concept of informed consent beyond bureaucratic institutional ethical review practices (Shamim and Quereshi). These latter entries are particularly important reads for potential doctoral supervisors in our current era of increased internationalisation, faced with the prospect of working with increasing numbers of scholars from the Global South and the need to be sensitive to diverse contexts and epistemologies. The final section: *Reimagining educational research approaches for emancipation*, opens with a compelling retake on quantitative approaches (Walter and Suina) that moves beyond the dominant positivistic

stance and its reliance on deficit ontological positions towards minorities and Southern knowledges (Walter & Andersen, 2016), and towards a set of recommendations for just practices and empowerment. The subsequent entries within this section of the book use a series of cases to exemplify the possibility of understanding beyond Western-centric mainstream approaches that predominate in the field of educational research. The focus group is re-envisioned (Jakobsen) along with the notion of researcher positionality, and this is further reimagined in the idea of social network interviewing (Swartz and Mahali) where participants become researchers, subverting the extractive tendencies of some Western framings. Relational and material cultural richness are prioritised in the remaining contributions along the lines of visual methods (Mitchell), poetic inquiry (Pithouse-Morgan et al.), relational habitus (Naveed), and pedagogies of absence, that subvert some of the technocentric attributes of many Anglophone pedagogies and schooling.

There is risk in compiling an edited collection of previously published work within a broad thematic, such as Southern approaches, in that the collection may fail to achieve a harmony. Moreover, and *specific* to decolonial work and the Global South, representation of the plurality and scholarly richness of epistemologies, philosophies, relationalities, and methodologies is essential to disturbing the “whiteness” of ontologies core to Western knowledge that defines all others in comparison to this “truth” (Fanon, 1967). This is an overarching strength of this book which exemplifies not just different ways of understanding and generating knowledge, but which also adopts the intellectual creativity to take familiar Western understandings and reimagine their limits and manifestations. This book is an important read for all educational researchers, and perhaps even more so for those intellectuals from the West and educated in an era of neoliberalised evidence-based politics of research. Drawing on Edward Said, this work challenges the reader to consider their position as an intellectual “allied with the stability of the victors and rulers or ... to consider that stability as a state of emergency threatening the less fortunate ... , and take into account the experience of subordination itself ...” (Said, 1994, p. 35) in and through their own approaches to educational research today.

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