# EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PRACTICE IN SOUTHERN CONTEXTS

## Recentring, Reframing and Reimagining Methodological Canons

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# Foreword

## REIMAGINING EDUCATION RESEARCH PRACTICES — FROM THE SOUTH TO NORTH

*Linda Tuhiwai Smith*

# FOREWORD

## Reimagining education research practices – from the South to North

*Linda Tuhiwai Smith*

My first encounters and experiences in learning the theories and methods of education research were challenging, intellectually traumatic in the sense that the world of knowledge I knew and wanted 'to research' was so far away from what the literature, what education experts, and what politicians and leading thinkers in New Zealand suggested I ought to be doing that I felt for a while I was swimming in a deep pool of 'double consciousness' (Du Bois, 1903). Initially, I began my research journey wanting to bring to the foreground the history of Māori education and the history of Māori in colonial education. But then I ran into the 'small' problem of the terms 'History' and 'History of Education'. My scope fell outside where History, as the story of the victors, was said to begin and where the History of New Zealand education officially started with the arrival and actions of British missionaries and a colonial settler government. I loved researching the archives but spent most of my energy being excited by how bold and resistant my people were in the face of colonial policies (Simon & Smith, 2001). I then moved to the curriculum and then to pedagogies, to teachers and language revitalisation, constantly trying to engage with what we were taught was 'the international literature' which in fact was literature from the North. I ran into a similar 'small' problem trying to develop my doctoral proposal on 'cultural literacy' where I was totally off the page in terms of how that term was being used in the literature (Simon & Smith, 2001).

With each change of focus I fell out of scope and felt out of place. It was that sense of epistemic dissonance coupled with a determination to find my own way that led me to the work of decolonising methodologies. It all came to a head when my Head of Department rejected my PhD proposal, fairly brutally but with humour and compassion so I didn't burst into tears, by telling me to do something I loved and wanted to spend the rest of my life thinking

about. At last, I was given permission to pursue my path, a path not yet known and a path I would need to step forward upon carefully and critically. Those early research experiences helped me think about education and social science research practices more deeply and critically, more philosophically, and yet more focussed on research practice, on methods, ethics, researcher insight, and thought processes. The decolonising methodologies I identified were ones I observed Indigenous communities, leaders, and activists practising in their discourses, actions, strategies, and mobilisations.

Researcher practices, the practices of education research are where I started my journey as a decolonising and Indigenous researcher and where, in the beginning, I fell out of scope and felt out of place. Being out of place was and is about orientation to place, to the direction a researcher faces as well as being about context. In simple terms, "With whose lens do we see and hear? With what frame do we foreground and centre our focus?" "What do we try hard not to see, hear, or accept because the literature told us those things do not exist?", and "How can we reframe, recentre, and reimagine research methods?" It is my real excitement to foreground or foreword the chapters and writers in this book. I am especially pleased to see a diverse range of researchers who are thinking and writing about actual practices from the Global South.

The chapters in this book address many of the fundamental dimensions and knowledge practices that researchers need, such as ethics, Indigenous data sovereignty, cultural and social practices that mediate researcher practices, methods that work in communities, and ways to theorise education research practices. The chapters are deeply grounded in the debates raised by anti-colonial and decolonial scholars, scholars from the Global South about education, schooling, knowledge, pedagogy, and power. This book will provide a richness of ideas and practices that should inform education research in the Global North as well as the South. It will provide an entry point to critiques from Southern theory of many of the canons of research methodology that have been entrenched by the Global North as being somehow 'universal'. When I was a graduate student most education research methods books to which I had access were heavy volumes, literally and figuratively, laden with assumptions about how these methods would apply in the Global South. It was not just methods' books either as texts that highlighted theory were similarly grand in their assumptions and claims about educational contexts across the globe. This book will be enormously useful to education graduate students and established education researchers as it brings together in one volume a depth of intellectual discussion and examples of research practices informed by Southern theory.

The first part of *Educational Research Practice in Southern Contexts* introduces us to a theoretical context for decolonising education research and for critically questioning the philosophical and moral tenets of research. These chapters provide an ease of introduction to Southern theoretical approaches

which are grounded in intersectional theories of settler colonial theory, postcolonial and decolonial theory, critical Indigenous theory, and theories of imperialism in relation to gender, race, caste, and class. These first chapters critique the knowledge canon of Northern theory and the hegemony of language categories and classification systems for understanding gender, learning abilities, and communities. This section of the book is an important introduction to the key theoretical debates and challenges that educate researchers about their practices, the framing of their questions, the assessment of the significance of their research, and their understanding of ethics and approaches to methods. Many of the concepts discussed in these early chapters are raised again in later chapters as examples of why the concept is so critical. Just as one example alone the absence and/or abuse of codes of ethics has been a source of contention across Indigenous communities whose colonial histories are steeped in examples of inhumane, exploitative, and harmful research or what Eve Tuck (2009, p. 409) refers to as "'damage-centred' research". Indigenous concern about researcher ethics has led to the development of a number of Indigenous protocols and ethical standards for researchers to meet before they enter communities. The kinds of decolonising scholarship that has deeply engaged researchers from the South are not necessarily well known to researchers in the North although many Southern researchers are trained in Northern institutions and many institutions of the South reproduce the canons of the North. The South-North binary is a very fluid idea in terms of how knowledge travels in the age of the internet. The first section of the book is a great introduction, what I would call 'Greetings and Invitations to the North from the South'.

The second section of the book contains research practice examples from very diverse non-Western contexts including examples of communities from the South who study in the North. These chapters talk directly to the practice of becoming an education researcher and being and knowing as an education researcher. For those researchers who have grown up in or identify with ethnic or tribal or marginalised communities, returning from higher education to carry out research is often fraught with tensions, challenges, and surprises as researchers navigate their way through the requirements of institutional ethics and the expectations of communities, the negotiation around language and meaning, trust and distrust, and identity and responsibilities. As these chapters argue, a reimagination and reframing process develops, or sometimes erupts, that engage participants in research in new ways as they begin to redefine themselves into active and engaged research participation. Over my career, I have witnessed the transformation that has occurred in my communities from once being suspicious of research to now wanting our own community members to be trained in research and in some cases to establish our own community-based research institutes. Indigenous community engagement in knowledge agenda setting, the framing of questions, and designing of methods alongside genuine capacity building has been exciting to observe in my

tribal communities. I have become a research elder in my communities, advising, mentoring, training, and guiding but not necessarily doing interviews or analysing data. The shift in the relations of power between researcher and researched opens up a whole new dimension of knowledge creation and ethical research. This section of the book raises the nuances and possibilities of decolonising research practices across multiple contexts and through the lens of different researchers and methods. Every method and tool in a researcher's toolbox gets reimagined in a decolonising frame and re-negotiated in terms of matters as important (to researchers) as who gets their name on a journal article, who attends conferences, who makes decisions, and who gets to ask the questions of an elder in an interview. It becomes possible to grasp the implications and changes that emancipatory research can release when power and control in research gets redistributed or shifts from the researcher community towards the researched community. It is not a fixed position but a fluid and constantly renegotiated positionality that researchers come to know.

The final section of the book moves into the new terrain, novel methodologies, and new practices for researchers working in decolonising frameworks. Transforming the power relations of research shifts everything, some things radically, and others more subtly. It reframes agendas and priorities, changes expectations of researcher knowledge and practices, changes education and research training, changes questions, and shifts the emphasis away from colonising and deficit framing of problems. In the New Zealand context, for example, every application for research funding requires researchers to show how their research addresses Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi and supports mātauranga Māori or Indigenous knowledge and methodologies. It has been a 30-year process of change that has transformed the national expectations of all researchers. In the field of Indigenous Studies, other long-held projects are still being pursued especially in the areas of data sovereignty, intellectual and cultural property rights, and the role of states, governments, and institutions in holding Indigenous data, artifacts, and human remains. Those legacies of colonialism are still being litigated but in a changed world where Museums have returned human remains and cultural items and are hyper-sensitive to questions of provenance and ownership. In a future world of artificial intelligence, for example, protocols over data sovereignty, decolonising algorithms, and protecting the diversity and integrity of Indigenous knowledge systems become highly relevant. In a world of climate change where impacts will not fall equitably on all groups in society the need for further innovative questions and methods becomes more urgent.

This book puts into scope many of the issues that researchers from the South have been working on for decades. It provides opportunities for North-South dialogue, for grappling with research practices and developing a critical education research praxis for all education researchers. I think that graduate students and their teachers, researchers, and institutions will find this volume

of work challenging, inspiring, helpful, and supportive. I hope they use this book in the curriculum and in the formal training of researchers in research ethics, theory, and practice.

## References

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