

**TEACHING AND
LEARNING IN HIGHER
EDUCATION:
THE CONTEXT
OF BEING,
INTERCULTURALITY
AND NEW
KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS**

Edited by

**MARGARET KUMAR
THUSHARI WELIKALA**

Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: The Context of Being, Interculturality and New Knowledge Systems

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Dedication

We would like to dedicate this book to our respective families for their continued support and encouragement

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Foreword

Skilfully edited and guided by two highly experienced and deeply expert scholars, Dr Margaret Kumar and Dr Thushari Welikala, this is a book that, to put it colloquially, really ‘hangs together’, that is to say a book that is cohesive and coherent in its content and the spirit of its message. Essentially what Kumar and Welikala have managed to do so well here is to perform what they proclaim, to be what they do. Knowledge, and the systems into which knowledge is organised, are notions that have long been central to the social sciences and humanities, in education and in various other academic disciplines. Being, however, or asking questions about what it means ‘to be’, has by contrast been subsumed and sometimes smuggled into our sense what it is to know and what it means to interact across cultures. The focus of this book goes to the heart of ideas related to Being, which have been half-posed and part-tackled for decades.

How can something so wide-ranging in its ambition and dealing with three concepts of great complexity, written by diverse authors from different perspectives, actually cohere? Principally because of a coherent conception, expert guidance provided to the contributors and expert editing. The editors, like the contributors, are perfectly selected for their roles. Dr Kumar is attached to Centurion University of Technology and Management at Odisha in India and Senior Fellow (Hon) at The University of Melbourne. She has not only observed and studied the critical themes of this book, but has lived them, taught them and reflected on them, deeply and for an extended time. As an academic, a research supervisor, lecturer, prolific author and reflective scholar, Dr Kumar brings a wealth of cultural and educational experience with Indigenous societies and diverse knowledge systems to bear on the complex issues raised in contemporary higher education. For Dr Kumar facilitating communication within and among different educational, cultural and individual groups, not only requires performativity in negotiation and awareness of difference, but also reflection on systems of difference and the problems of teaching, learning and mediation in the contemporary world.

I have had the pleasure of working with Dr Kumar for many years and I am constantly impressed by the scope of her vision for transforming how we teach and how people learn to generate a fairer and more effective educational practice. This reforming mission for higher education is for an envisaged world, which we can only imagine and aspire to achieve at present. But we must prepare for this imagined world in which epistemological principles are more democratic, negotiated and complete compared to current inequalities.

Dr Thushari Welikala is Senior Lecturer in higher education at the Institute of Medical and Biomedical Education at St George's University of London. Her profound suitability for the challenge contained in the chapters of this book comes from her roles as Director of Continuing Educational Development at the Centre for Innovation and Development in Education at St George's. Here she contributes to improving professionalism and generally to make teaching and learning more effective. In all this she imagines and creates practices of education that are, as this book proclaims and delivers, responsive to the potential multicultural, multilingual and multisemiotic, superdiverse societies we inhabit today. Whether it is life sciences, medicine, or language, Dr Thushari, clearly understands, from practice, praxis and theory, from writing and teaching, that internationalisation and interculturalism in learning and teaching, mean profound changes to how we conceive of knowledge itself. It also means changes to concepts of who learners and teachers are, and how their engagement in processes of teaching and learning change and affect all participants. Dr Thushari is also able to inform her reflections with an acute sensitivity to comparative education research, so that how 'difference' is conceived in different places is itself an issue for interrogation and reflection, comparison and study.

The inevitably interdisciplinary character of this book is already present in the academic and professional trajectories of its editorial partnership. In today's higher education, more than ever before, old and new 'Beings' enter and are given life in educational settings where intercultural encounter is normal. However, the specific elements, such as the combination of languages, literacies, semiotic practices, desires and assumptions, that combine in higher education today are not ones for which history can offer much guidance. Too much is new and uncharted in what we do that unique interactions arise in contemporary global education and so new knowledges need to be generated. These new knowledges are organised into New Knowledge Systems which reflect the different geographic and disciplinary backgrounds of learners and teachers, and so provide a multitude of trajectories into and from teaching, learning and research.

This brave book looks to deepen these everyday encounters in higher education by looking squarely into its deepest corners: the conceptualisation of Being, Interculturality and New Knowledge Systems. Because these concepts are interrogated from a variety of personal experiences the collective impact of the chapters forces the reader to see not just an abstract and philosophical idea of the concept of 'Being' or 'to be', and not just concepts of the capitalised Intercultural or New Knowledge Systems. Instead, the reader is forced to confront definitions and extrapolations of these important concepts in the concrete lived experience, and even the psychological personalities, of individuals. Being, at its centre, and perhaps the least discussed concept in recent history, is therefore instantiated in a range of communities and personal dispositions, cultures and professional activities. There are many ways to be, and many ways to think about how to be, and these are never far from how we forge and form other educationally relevant concepts which we define and discuss much more often.

I have the impression that today 'culture' does a lot of work in a range of fields. The culture concept, or a concept of culture, is recruited to explain failures

to communicate and failures to understand. I can recall police departments, hospitals and other institutions apologising for 'cultural problems' in their interactions with the public, often with the new publics of minority populations who are asserting their rights not to be ignored, assimilated and overlooked. But culture as an adjective describing how any human system works collectively, and what its values and symbols predispose it to do, is employed even more widely. Perhaps it is true to say that today the culture concept suffers from too much exposure and diffusion; that it does too much work.

The same cannot be said of Being, which is far too little discussed and far too little reflected upon. Too much about what it means 'to be' is taken for granted or totally ignored. At least in educational institutions of superdiverse societies any kind of human interacting across differences must come up across different notions of Being and its many cultural manifestations. Yet the Being concept is hardly noticed and rarely poked at conceptually. Much less commonly than 'culture' is the concept of Being and the multiple ways 'to be' a human subject, teased out and talked about. Redressing this paucity of attention is what this book aims to achieve. Foregrounding Being in cultural discussion moves towards an active representation of culture, whereas it is often defined as closed and homogenous within interculturality. Often the limitations injected into the way culture informs policy and practice in education end up raising barriers, foregrounding separation and even fostering segregation behind superficial 'difference', when in fact most human interactions are in some sense deeply cross-cultural. The dynamic and non-essentialist conception of Being that pervades the chapters of this book allow us to see to new horizons and to review what we might have overworked in the past in a richer light.

The narratives that form the bulk of the book discuss radically different processes of interaction, but they are based on a shared critical realist view of knowledge and how it is constructed. The authors look with a critical eye at relevant academic writing and theories, and at real world problems, to explore different knowledge systems in interaction. Some knowledge systems they address are emergent, others are dominant, some are oppressed and repudiated, while others are arrogant and wield the power of hegemonic prevailing. All people, as individuals, and all Peoples, as groups, have knowledge. Individual items of knowledge are drawn from and carry residues or traces of the 'systems' from which cognition is drawn. This is the essential message of the compelling writing in this book and it is for all of us in higher education who teach and research immersed in the encounters of migration, indigeneity, mobility and knowledge creation.

We are being asked to look in and at ourselves, at what we know, how we know what we know, what we don't know that others know, and whether we know that we don't know. These kinds of searching processes can help us to know more deeply, more democratically, and more productively, to see our learners as participants with us in shared discovery. The aim is to help guide our stressed societies to a more collaboratively interacting, and just, deliberation of our increasingly shared life. To help us to teach more effectively, to research more productively in collaborations, and to produce the professionals who deliver services to society more attuned to living in a world of expanding and deepening acceptance.

I think this book succeeds very well in its generous invitation to us to critically engage with stories that problematise the familiar and familiarise the strange. At the very least the book asks us to acknowledge the legitimate and already present existence of the different, to not judge it strange, and to do all this without recourse to exotica or hierarchy.

Because the three main concepts recur throughout the writing, they help the book to ‘hang together’. While the book is about education, and specifically higher education, and therefore about teaching and learning, the pedagogical and disciplinary scope of its central concepts of Being, Interculturality and New Knowledge Systems, percolate much more widely. They reach into global health (in the era of COVID no less), into psychology and subjectivity, into linguistic and multiple language ecologies, into settings of postcolonial accommodation and also within the centres from various colonisation processes originated.

For all these reasons the book will appeal across academia, in university disciplines as much as college and professional curriculums, to researchers and practitioners from multiple scholarly backgrounds. I can see people in academic support activities and also medical practitioners of diverse kinds benefitting. For immigrant, tribal, Indigenous and First Nations people engaged in taking up new openings to teach better, to teach more democratically, or to reclaim space taken from them, and who want to design and deliver more effective and more just education, the book is a rich repository of ideas, perspectives and reflections.

At its base, the book and all authors want to improve education and enrich knowledge through new and sometimes challenging perspectives. In a more active stance the book’s contributors, if I can generalise across their differences, want to inject into education a message of the significance of the three concepts and link this to an ambition of repairing injury, past damage and collective limitation. In effect the book opens a civilisational dialogue about human mentalities in higher education.

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