



**Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (Eds.). (2018). *Toward what justice? Describing diverse dreams of justice in education*. New York: Routledge.**

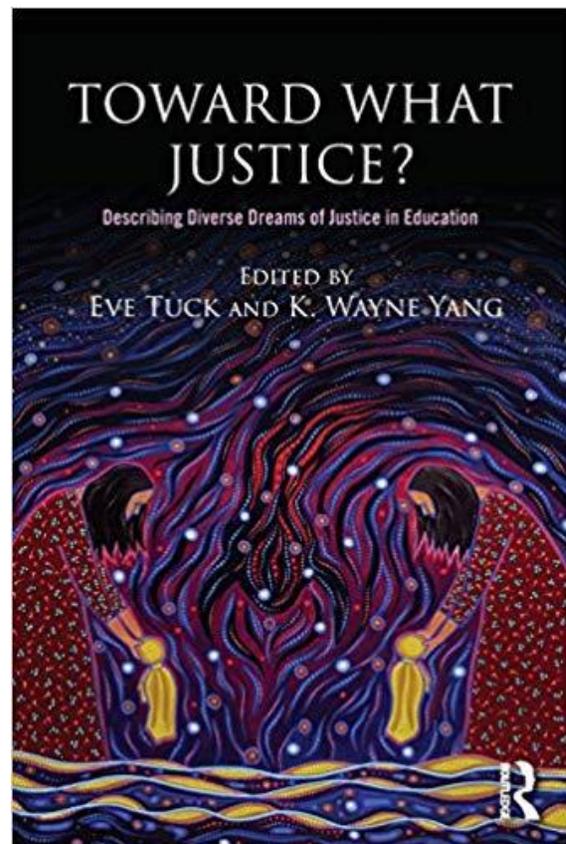
**Pp. 167**

**ISBN: # 978-1-138-20571-0**

**Reviewed by McKenzie Bolar, Alicia Ouellette, Annette Quarre & Francisco Rios  
Western Washington University  
United States**

Perhaps at no other time in the nation's most recent history have we found ourselves at a critical juncture in terms of the future of education for equity and social justice. On the one hand, progress has been made to foster an ethic of inclusion by way of advancing specific ideas around closing the opportunity gap (Carter & Welner, 2013). Recently, there have also been renewed efforts to revitalize curriculum by way of implementing ethnic studies generally (for example, the new ethnic studies statewide initiative in California) and Native American education specifically (for example, statewide efforts in Montana and Washington that require K-12 teachers to implement curricula specific to tribal nations within their state).

On the other hand, we are seeing a gradual erosion of important civil and educational rights under the current administration. Among these are efforts to scale back protections for LGBTQ youth, to diminish the rights of victims of sexual violence, to reject policies aimed at countering the increase in racial and economic segregation, and to reduce protections aimed at disrupting discriminatory discipline practices that



differently impact African-American and Latinx youth.

As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, co-editors of the book *Toward What Justice?* posit, we are witness to significant critiques of education at the K-12 level as well as that of higher education. Most provocatively, two ideological frameworks – anti-blackness and settler colonialism – are used to explain the root causes of the opportunity and achievement gaps. The question becomes whether these two ideologies are so pervasive in how we think about and engage in education in K-12 schools and universities that these institutions are beyond reform all together. As important, answering “yes” engenders a follow-up question that requires us to consider the radical imaginary of education. In this way, Tuck and Yang invite us to explore “toward what justice?”

The authors introduce the anthology with a meditation on justice, social justice projects, and an ethic of incommensurability: the concept that we work toward separate ideals of liberation and yet certain conditions lead our paths to cross, fostering a “contingent collaboration” (p. 2). Tuck and Yang find such a collaboration prominent in today’s social-political climate between abolition and decolonization. Under this logic, the authors introduce recurring questions for critical social justice educators and scholars: Where do schools lie in a framework of abolition and decolonization? Are schools as redeemable as many of us want them to be? How do we grapple with our presence within these hegemonic sites and our radical imaginations?

We know that education has, historically, served the interests of the dominant culture while undermining the rights of those who have been and are minoritized. While important gains have been made today to advance education equity and justice, continuing challenges serve to maintain those historical legacies in education as a colonizing and dehumanizing project. Michael Dumas

(Ch 2), for example, walks the reader through Black suffering as a lived reality, contextualizing present-day examples of consumable Black suffering in the continued slave-Master relationship that pervades American schools. From Crystal Laura’s perspective (Ch 1), educators are either responsible for “incarceration prevention or incarceration expansion” (p. 25), also stressing the necessity of considering schoolwork as “anti-prison work” (p. 26). As a third example, Christi Belcourt (Ch. 7) shares concerns around how resource extraction, linguistic of indigenous languages, and individualism are killing the planet. Through an ethic of incommensurability, multiple authors dream of what justice may look like for the Black and Indigenous communities.

Although the Black community calls for abolition and Black liberation and the Indigenous community demands decolonization, their differing objectives are interrelated and can be utilized in ways that benefit both groups. As such, *Towards What Justice?* complicates how social justice and social justice projects are understood beyond common conceptions. For example, language surrounding movements of justice is discussed throughout the book. Most notably, Rinaldo Walcott (Ch 5; see also Dumas, Ch 2) considers how radical-in-origin words like “diversity” have been co-opted by dominant systems of power for economic gain and the oppression of specific social identity groups. Nirmala Erevelles (Ch 4) acknowledges the ontological ableism which runs like a strong current through American culture and social justice projects (specifically) constructing the disabled body as not only not whole (which is untrue), but as nonhuman. Similarly, Leigh Patel (Ch 6) helps readers understand how injustice lives alongside justice-oriented projects. Much injustice is exacerbated by an ideology and narrative of linearity that assumes progress and incremental advancement.

A critical question raised by more than one author, but especially by Sandy Grande (Ch 3),

is whether universities can be “reformed.” Grande’s chapter focuses on the university and its foundation and role as a perpetuator of settler crimes against Black and Indigenous people. Beginning with naming these injustices and sharing what work has already been done to counteract them, Grande asks us to consider which injustices still await to be addressed and whether we ought to address them from within or outside of the university. This book challenges us – faculty and teachers-in-training of a university – to consider the following: What is our role as contributors to the hegemonic university structure? How do we prevent ourselves from perpetuating similar inequities in public schools? What needs to occur in higher education that has already been envisioned? And how can we exist within this system that has been created with the intention of denying justice to so many people? From here, we must consider what can be imagined, what is possible, and what we can do moving forward.

As we struggle with the question of complicity in hegemonic systems, we are asked to further examine the practical questions and implications of this text. It is essential to center these questions and implications as we cannot forget that many of the students in our classrooms come from marginalized communities and we, as educators, owe it to them to do this work. We remember Flores’s (2017) description of how teachers of color can be imagined as swimmers. They have just navigated the choppy waters of their own schooling experience, and now must return to those waters as life-guards (in this instance, cultural guardians) to help those in their charge navigate the waters themselves.

This text is not easy to digest and does not offer simple solutions or instructions for educators to apply. *Toward What Justice?* acknowledges the tensions and difficulty of this work in education. This text does not serve as a step-by-step manual to justice work; rather it challenges us to embody a mindset and state of being that actively rejects injustice.

The knowledge presented by the authors holds value in its authenticity, its questions, its challenges, and its hope.

While the strength of *Toward What Justice?* lies in the theoretical, it nevertheless instills a belief that action and change is the responsibility of readers. We are asked to consider not only what we are committed to do, but also what we are committed to *refuse* (p. 8). While we can commit to a justice-oriented framework, the complex nature of these topics poses additional challenges for middle school and high school educators. How can we render these thoughts and conversations accessible without over simplification that could reduce the urgency and importance of the messages? It is impossible to embark on this journey as individuals separate from our students; they are why we do this work and deserve to be included in it. Grounding these dreams of possibility gives strength to our pursuit of the radical imaginary future that could provide so much more for our students.

*Toward What Justice?* provides its readers the opportunity to think creatively and radically about a vision, an image of social justice. This invitation is especially important because one aim of colonization is to stifle the imagination of the possibilities of freedom. We learn that this cannot be simply a vision of the future but must also account for those spaces and places where the future is currently being created, as Belcourt eloquently describes. Walcott argues that only by engaging in imaginative resistance can we envision justice beyond hegemonic ideologies and oppressive institutional systems. In doing so, we should heed Grande’s call for collectivity, reciprocity, and mutuality between groups, acting in solidarity “within, against, and beyond the university” (p. 51) as a means of refusal and assertion of justice.

A strength of this edited volume is the multiple visions and pathways regarding that radical imaginary. Given the diversity of the

perspectives, it is hard to walk away with one clear radical imaginary because we are exposed to multiple visions and dreams of things as they might be and the struggles that each would entail. At the same time, Patel cautions us to be careful with the visions of justice that we propose because injustices are often embedded within.

But these visions, too, may often be incommensurable. Consider, for example, Erevelles's assertion that the social justice path is not the same for everyone and differs given the various social identity groups and their collective experiences. Thus, when speaking about disability, inclusion is a desired goal whereas others within the volume are questioning critically what they are being included into. We also wonder, much as Erevelles does, what other marginalized social identities are not included in this volume. One glaring omission is the voices of critical Latinx academics, scholars, and activists, a striking omission given that Latinx students are the largest minoritized ethnic group attending schools in the United States.

Rather than thinking about justice as some broad ideal with an end goal, we might do well to share our vision of what needs to be done in the short-run, especially in tangible and concrete terms. (See Heller, 2019, for a description of what this might look like with respect to "equality.") This is critical because, as Patel notes, justice is servitude and not a moral compass. It might be like the approach to writing that E. L. Doctorow (McInerney, 1999) described when driving at night: "You can see only as far as the headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way" (p. 88). Would a focus on eliminating structural barriers, especially those that most immediately inflict material harm to our

visions of justice, be a productive way forward given our imaginary pursuits? Perhaps most importantly, we hope this book opens the doors for greater conversation in schools and universities about how education might be different, with keen attention to what our students, families, and communities believe and want from their schools and their teachers.

Those of us born under the rising star of justice may never know what vision we *ought* to strive for. We are cultural guardians assisting those lost in turbulent waves; we are late night drivers on a road trip to nowhere; we are star-obsessed astrologists trying to make sense of what hard Western science cannot seem to tell us; we are midwives guiding the birth of a new generation of dreamers who are not our own to raise. The ethic of incommensurability, collaborative work, and overlapping projects aligns our paths toward justice. We learn a most important fact from the anthology: The imaginary is pragmatic and practical.

What this text provides the academy is an opportunity to pursue greater political clarity about education. It does so by bringing us back to some core questions around why and how we educate in the first place. For us, this includes three fundamental questions. First, is the American education system so inculcated with a hegemonic ideology, narratives and discourses, and institutional structures that it is impossible to achieve educational equity and justice? Second, what are the concrete, tangible steps educators and academics can take in the short-run to move toward the vision of justice that guides them? And, finally, and perhaps most importantly, what is that radical imaginary of education as it might be; that is, toward what vision of justice ought we to strive?

## References

- Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (Eds.) (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199982981.001.0001>

Flores, G. M. (2017). *Latina teachers*. New York: New York University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479839070.001.0001>

Heller, N. (2019). The philosopher redefining equality. *The New Yorker Online*. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/07/the-philosopher-redefining-equality>

McInerney, J. (1999). An interview with Doctorow. In C. D. Morris (Ed.), *Conversations with E. L. Doctorow* (pp. 88-91). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

### About the Reviewers

**McKenzie Bolar, Alicia Ouellette, and Annette Quarre** are graduate students in the teacher education program at Western Washington University. **Francisco Rios** is professor of secondary education at Western Washington University.



**Education Review**

**Reseñas Educativas**

**Resenhas Educativas**

 *Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the edXchange initiative's Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

**Disclaimer:** The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview