



Book review. Dey, S. (2022). *Green academia: Towards eco-friendly education systems*. Routledge India.

Michael J. D. Sutton^A

A

Fellow of the Business Excellence Institute

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2023.6.1.24>

Introduction

Does your quest for knowledge include current topics encompassing colonialism, capitalism, decolonization, indigenous knowledge, ecology, economy, epistemic revolution, and sustainability? If so, this text will invite you into a world of imagination and reality where the clashes between these extremes are exceptionally well-defined and fittingly described.

Dr. Sayan Dey is attempting to "reinstat[e] the nature-based and environment-friendly pedagogical and curricular infrastructures in the mainstream educational institutions [with]in the post-COVID-19 era" (p. 16). He does not dwell upon COVID-19 per se but uses it as a backdrop for institutional transformation in order to intertwine ecology and the environment as core practices for curriculum change in teaching, learning, and education.

This book focuses on the emergent and new "epistemic revolution" associated with educational change. The word epistemic means "of or relating to knowledge or knowing" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). An epistemic revolution may come about when unexpected unifying forces across very different disciplines occur.

Three conditions are encompassed by the concept of epistemic knowledge: truth, belief, and justification. The critical question becomes, "How do I know what I know?" Epistemic knowledge is considered intellectually demanding. Epistemic knowledge often takes a secondary or even tertiary role to content knowledge and procedural knowledge. These three forms of knowledge create a framework for reasoning:

Knowledge ... is the understanding of the major facts, concepts and explanatory theories that form the basis of [scientific] knowledge. Such knowledge includes knowledge of both the natural world and technological artefacts (content knowledge), knowledge of how such ideas are produced (procedural knowledge), and an understanding of the underlying rationale for these procedures and the justification for their use (epistemic knowledge) (OECD, 2019, p. 16).

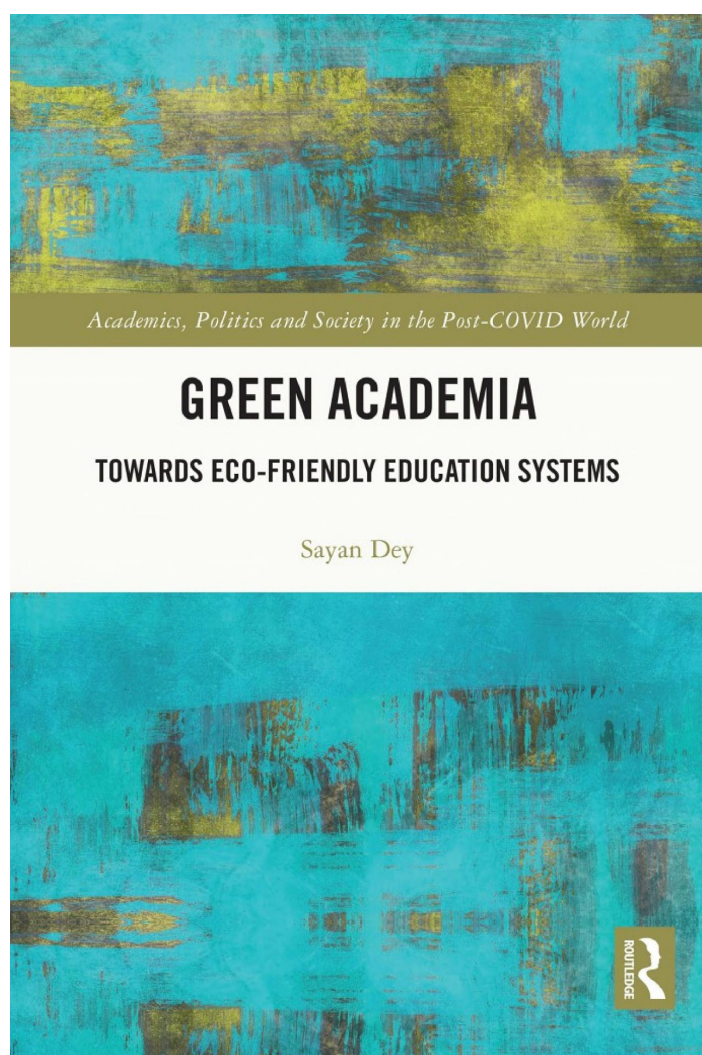


Figure 1. Book cover.

The author argues that:

'green academia' or eco-friendly systems of knowledge cultivation have been the central pattern of gaining and sharing knowledges since the evolution of this planet. Every contemporary form of an education system is rooted in the liveliness and practicality of the natural environment... So, the purpose behind the appeal toward collectively building green academic systems across the planet in this book is to reconfigure the existing eco-friendly systems of knowledge production in diverse social, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. To manufacture self-profiting, abusive, and physiologically fractured empires of knowledge production across the globe, the knowledge systems that were rooted in the natural environment were systematically, epistemically, and institutionally disrupted by the European colonizers (p. 2).

European civilization gave birth to systems of knowledge that were Capitalist, Patriarchal, Western-Centric, Christian-Centric, modern, and colonial. The planet has never recovered from these imperatives, which has resulted in a planet that is exhibiting significant climate and environmental damage, resulting in a critical lack of nutritious food resources throughout the planet. Dey suggests that universities and centers for learning are based upon the Western ego-centric knowledge dissemination models that strictly commodify, collect, and withhold knowledge within their protected ivory towers. These institutions fail to incorporate critical and significant eco-centric indigenous systems of knowledge into the curriculum and learning outcomes.

Analysis and significance

The overall context for the book is an indictment of Western ego-centric knowledge systems, manifested within most universities, colleges, and educational institutions. Dey proposes the timely need for eco-centric indigenous systems of knowledge collections and dissemination. An associated epistemic revolution has appeared on the horizon:

The European colonial era transformed nature from a 'source' of knowledges into a 'resource' for hunting, gathering, extracting, and profit-making. The acts of hunting, gathering, extracting, and profit-making were physical processes and ideological processes. To elaborate, through the process of physically exploiting the natural environment, the colonizers made an effort to socially, culturally, economically, racially, and epistemically invisibilize and erase the multifaceted knowledge systems of the indigenous communities that were closely knitted to the natural environment (p. 2).

Dey outlines the locations of continuing 'ecocides' occurring throughout the planet, but almost exclusively in the developing nations and economies. He describes the history of exploitation in terms of 'modern industrialization' and how it was embraced as the 'natural evolution' of progress by Western nations. Those colonization-driven states looted,

stole, patented, and subjugated less fortunate sovereign nations. Indigenous knowledge systems were delegitimized, dehumanized, disassembled, discredited, depleted, and often labeled 'savage' and 'backward'. At the same time, the colonial powers usurped the raw natural resources and sent them back to their home nations for commercialization, refinement, repackaging, incorporation into manufactured products, and pharmaceutical exploitation.

The author's thesis is threefold:

1. European colonization pilfered developing nations and embezzled natural resources, which led to extreme physical deprivation. Other authors referred to these actions as "a double cultural decapitation" (Thiong'o, 2009, p. 87) or "mnemonic decapitation" (Zerubavel, 2004, p. 91). These forms of decapitation physically violated the indigenous groups through droughts, environmental degradation and destruction, food crises, permanent closure of local industries, poverty, racism, slavery, state corruption, violence, war, and water depletion.
2. The colonial bureaucratic institutions and processes have indoctrinated the current education systems such that:
 - 2.1. The rampant obsession with assessments of schools, colleges, and universities, students, teachers, professors, and academic departments has created a mechanized homogeneity to learning that diminishes the diversity of the creative process. Educational institutions are disconnected from the natural environment, ecology, and indigenous knowledge. Instead, these entities concentrate on the classroom and the laboratory.
 - 2.2. Productivity of faculty, researchers, and learners is measured quantitatively, not qualitatively.
 - 2.3. Teaching and research concentrate on analytics-based, quantitative methodologies rather than qualitative methodologies for the dissemination of knowledge. Perspectives founded upon multidimensional ecological, environmental, and indigenous knowledge are globally undervalued and discounted.
 - 2.4. The capitalist imperative of manipulating learners into customers and consumers. The new generation of learners are duped into seeking financial compensation from the utility of acquired knowledge, instead of seeking knowledge and investigative research for its own sake.
 - 2.5. The imperative of establishing the English language as the international standard for communications, instead of revitalizing, sustaining, stimulating, and practicing global indigenous languages. The domination of

communications in English results in the degradation, conquering, and obliteration of indigenous science and literature knowledge originating from natural ecosystems.

- 2.6. The overwhelming presence of European and Western textbooks in the curriculum of developing and evolving less-privileged nations. The challenge in nations that are attempting to cast off their colonial past is the lack of legitimacy, recognition, and validation of theories and philosophies prevalent in the indigenous knowledge bases.
3. Perceiving the development of COVID-19 as a calamitous relationship between capitalistic practices of knowledge management and knowledge production resulting in complete degradation of the existing education systems.
- 3.1. The pandemic crippled the laborers, daily wage workers, odd-job workers, subsistence farmers, and lower working classes in developing countries—those who are primarily outside the capitalistic means of economic production and distribution. Of course, low wage earners and small businesspeople in developing countries were affected, but socialist unemployment programs supported their survival.
- 3.2. Professionals and some administrative staff emerged as a protected elite who could continue to contribute remotely to the economy and "make a sustainable living." Metropolitan centers and urban environments became government-controlled, personal prisons, where governments propagandized the necessity of vaccinations and the need for vaccination passports to legitimize the capacity for mobility.
- 3.3. Most importantly, though, curricular infrastructures in all the mainstream, bureaucratic educational institutions totally collapsed, resulting in the global degradation of pedagogical and andragogical learning spaces. Most students and learners experienced a significant loss over two to three years in their educational capacities. A significant majority of educational institutions and their faculty were ill-prepared to convey learning through online media, especially in countries where the internet in the home was in its infancy.

Relevance and intended audience

This book is a ground-breaking contribution that covers a broad spectrum of topics related to the impact on education institutions of European and Western colonization; colonial bureaucratic educational institutions and processes; and the catastrophic impact of COVID-19 on degrading existing education systems.

Traditional modes and content for teaching and learning are at a tipping point. Globally, nation-state funding is declining. Significant demographic and emigrational/immigrational shifts are occurring worldwide. International competition is intensifying. Most significantly, our current educational and learning models are severely impacted by disruptive technologies, (such as AI; augmented data analytics; blockchain; augmented, virtual, and mixed reality; Internet of Things (IoT); natural language processing; robotics; 3-D printing; and machine learning), which rely predominantly on Western capitalism to prosper. We will be forced to seek out new indigenous knowledge bases to balance the emergent techno-centric and sociotechnical knowledge systems. Dey is surrounded by various contemporaries who are publishing remarkable journal articles and books within this niche area (e.g. Bisz & Mondelli, 2023).

The intended target audience is "scholars and researchers of sociology, cultural studies, decolonial studies, education, ecology, public policy, social anthropology, sustainable development, sociology of education, and political sociology" (p. iii). The author is successful in engaging his target audience on multiple levels.

Authoritative foundation of the author

A hegemonic civilization is the foundation for a global economic system that continues to structure its success on a "developmental-extraction-based economic model" (de Sousa Santos, 2011, p. 19). The author shares recognition of this topic with a broad range of other authors, including: Bacevic (2021); de Sousa Santos (2011); Fassbinder et al. (2014); Gough et al., (2020); Jackson (2015); Kancler (2016); Krøvel (2020); Kumaran (2022); Loske (2020); and Roseman (2012).

Critique and recommendation

The text is well-structured and well-articulated but uses intense vocabulary on occasion. The book is divided into five chapters:

1. Introduction: Why green academia?
2. Eco-friendly academic systems: A journey to the roots
3. Transformations: Curriculum and pedagogy
4. Political ecology and science and technology studies: Weaving intersectional academic spaces
5. Non-conclusion: A multidimensional mechanism

Including photos to support some case studies and experiments could have provided a visual foundation for the text's premise. The lack of informative graphics and figures presents a textually dense treatise but one that is still approachable. Each chapter furnishes the reader with

an in-depth analysis of educational issues and challenges resulting from historical and current global colonization. Each chapter is followed by a detailed "Works Cited" section that stimulates the reader to investigate further the themes presented in the chapter. This section also forms the foundation for the evidence behind Dey's theses.

To summarize the book, we need only read the details of the Postscript written by Dr. William Jethro Mpofu, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Mpofu has both summarized the intent and value proposition of the book, while concurrently suggesting a manifesto for the Green Academia.

Green academia as rendered in this book is the description of decolonized and liberating education that is based on learning from nature and its diversity and multiplicity that necessitates conversation, dialogue, and critical exchange... One measure of decolonized education, that is 'green academia' in the gesture of this book, is how far it goes in its respect for and preservation of nature and collective life. It should be an education that goes well beyond anthropocentric egoism and selfishness and entertains diversity of being and planetarity. The green part of the term 'green academia' therefore is more than a reference to nature as represented in living green vegetation but a metaphor of nature as alive and a subject that sustains life and is in conversation, dialogically, with humans (p. 114).

This book transformed and informed my knowledge of the corrupt capitalist, genocidal, and colonial models of education. I now possess a much deeper understanding of the histories, traditions, and cultures of the Global South. I regret that I did not awaken to this august assembly of scholars and practitioners before I reached my early seventies. I suffer from an inability to actually contribute in situ to the work of "challenging the constructs of colonial power and push back the privilege of colonial systems of knowledge, power, and being" (p. 112). I am no longer in enough of a healthy disposition to travel to the Global South and work in the front lines as a knowledge activist for curricular changes. Nonetheless, I unambiguously and wholeheartedly support the vision, goals, and objectives set out in *Green Academia*.

Additional references

Bacevic, J. (2021). Unthinking knowledge production: from post-Covid to post-carbon futures. *Globalizations*, 18(7), 1206-1218.

Bisz, J., & Mondelli, V. L. (2023). *The educator's guide to designing games and creative active-learning exercises: The allure of play*. Teachers College Press.

de Sousa Santos, B. (2011). Epistemologies of the South. *Revista Internacional de Filosofía Iberoamericana y Teoría*

Social, 54, 17–39.

Fassbinder, S. D., Nocella II, A. J., & Kahn, R. (2014). *Greening the academy*. Sense Publishers. <http://www.gci.org.uk/Documents/greeningtheacademy.pdf>

Gough, A., Lee, J. C. K., & Tsang, E. P. K. (Eds.). (2020). *Green schools globally: Stories of impact on education for sustainable development*. Springer.

Jackson, M. G. (2015). Learning for cultural transformation: Lessons from rural India. In D. Selby & F. Kagawa (Eds.), *Sustainability frontiers: Critical and transformative voices from the borderlands of sustainability education* (pp. 59-78). Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Kancler, T. (2016). Toward a non-Eurocentric "Academia." In J. Pristovšek & M. Gržinić (Eds.), *Theoretical-critical horizons shifting baselines* (pp. 23-29). https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf225/theoretical-critical-horizons_01_final2.pdf#page=23

Krøvel, R. (2020). A dialogue of knowledges—what can we bring home from the plurivers? In A. Breidlid & Roy Krøvel (Eds.) *Indigenous knowledges and the sustainable development agenda* (pp. 128-149). Routledge.

Kumaran, A. (2022). Sustainability and education: Restoring dignity of communities in the classrooms and beyond. *Advances in Research*, 23(6), 106-115.

Loske, R. (2020). *Re-embedding the economy in nature and society: Seven theses on the socio-ecological reorientation of the economy in times of Covid-19 and the climate crisis*. CUSANUS Working Papers, 62. https://www.cusanus-hochschule.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/62_Reembedding2.pdf

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Epistemic. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epistemic>.

OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 assessment and analytical framework*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/b25efab8-en>

Roseman, M. (2012). Chapter 17: Temiar cosmopolitan: Indigenous knowledge in a globalizing world. In Z. Ibrahim (Ed.) *Social science and knowledge in a globalizing world* (pp. 389-407). Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia and Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.

Thiong'o, N. W. (2009). *Something torn and new: An African renaissance*. Basic Civitas Books.

Zerubavel, E. (2004). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. University of Chicago Press.

Copyright: © 2023 Michael J. D. Sutton. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.