

Land In Libraries: Towards a Materialist Conception of Education, edited by Lydia Zvyagintseva and Mary Greenshields

Cora Coady 

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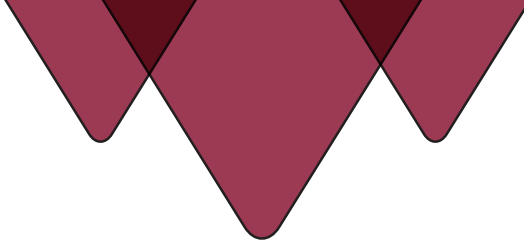
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Book Review: *Land in Libraries: Towards a Materialist Conception of Education*

Zvyagintseva, Lydia, and Mary Greenshields, eds. *Land in Libraries: Towards a Materialist Conception of Education*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2023, 204pp, \$45.00

Cora Coady

York University

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The editors and authors of *Land in Libraries* have graciously offered their knowledge and scholarship in a personal and relational manner. As an Indigenous librarian, in gratitude for their work, I feel compelled to respond relationally. I took this book on vacation, and I wasn't mad about it. I read it while lying in a lawn chair surrounded by my squash plants that are growing out of my tiny garden and taking over the concrete kingdom that makes up much of Toronto, Treaty 13 territory. I read this book while on the shores of Lake Huron covered in sand after playing a rock hunting game with my children. I read this book while sitting on a dock in the territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, known as the Bruce Peninsula, and keeping a watchful eye on my youngest child swimming, and it was worth it.

Land in Libraries: Towards a Materialist Conception of Education is about the ways in which libraries inhabit the land, how they relate to their environment (or in most cases stand apart from it), contribute to colonial power structures and break away from them. Seven chapters take us through history, architecture, collections, services, and sustainable practices. The editors are both settler librarians and the authors are Indigenous and settler librarians from across Turtle Island or what is commonly known as Canada and the United States. Collectively, the authors convey that grounding libraries physically and in practice is crucial for decolonization, community building, and climate action. It is time to move away from the idea of libraries as ahistorical, neutral, and landless entities.

The book opens with an introduction by editor Lydia Zvyagintseva. She situates herself, the purpose, and process behind the book's creation. The first chapter



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provides a history lesson in pre-Carnegie libraries in the Western United States by archivist Andrew Weymouth. Examining the ideologies behind libraries, Weymouth explains that their goal has been to educate and improve society. Weymouth notes the conflicts in this ideology, describing private libraries owned by individuals such as Leland Stanford, a railroad magnate and Republican governor of California. Stanford played a key role in organizing a militia to arrest, kill, and enslave Native Americans. There were also libraries formed by temperance movements and fraternal orders, which sought to control their patrons' access to knowledge. As a Canadian, it is always interesting to see the parallels between our histories, but also the distinct departures.

Danielle Marie Bitz describes how her experience as a Métis librarian on a canoe trip changed her perspective on how libraries and librarians relate to diverse knowledge and the land. Bitz's chapter was extremely relatable to me as an Indigenous person of mixed heritage and of a similar age and interests, however Bitz's approach to learning from the land, both her initial inclination to seek answers in history books and her changing perspective, caused me to consider how I seek to learn from our lands and waters.

Architect Gregory Whistance-Smith offers a case study of how Edmonton's Calder and Capilano Public Libraries stand apart from their natural surroundings or integrate into them. Libraries can serve not just as a container for resources, but can play an integral role in rooting community members in local knowledge. Without a background in architecture but an invested interest in the design of library spaces, this chapter was intriguing, and it left me wanting to learn more. Luckily, this chapter, like all other chapters, provides a complete list of references.

Many chapters provide concrete actions that individuals and institutions can take to contribute to efforts to decolonize. Laura Marie Judge and Jedidiah Crook conducted a content analysis of the local history collections of New Hampshire Public Libraries. They examine the practice of "firsting" and "lasting" in settler colonial narratives. This "firsting" and "lasting" serves to erase Indigenous history and devalue Indigenous knowledge. They advocate for striking a balance between preserving the patrons' "right to know" and enriching the collection with contemporary Indigenous knowledge. This chapter adds additional perspectives to an ongoing conversation in many libraries.

Courtney S. Nomiya and Truc Ho examine land-based education in the top twenty research libraries according to the Association of Research Libraries 2021. They scrutinized the data associated with the university library research commons' stated values, strategic plans and staffing. The authors were able to identify significant gaps between stated values and practices that if addressed would make significant inroads in the efforts to decolonize. This could stand as a call to action for

many institutions.

Métis librarian Ashley Edwards along with Dr. Julia Lane, Dr. Alex Shield, and Dal Sohal contribute to the conversation around creating meaningful land acknowledgements. The suggestions they make provide important guidance to those seeking to recognize the Indigenous history of the land and the role we all play in building community and caring for the land. Finally, Ariel Hanh provides concrete actions that libraries can take to mitigate the environmental damage of cloud-based technology. Degrowth as a rallying call feels anathema to the efforts of academic institutions who are constantly pushing to expand, however it deserves deep consideration for the sake of all our relations.

This book should be read by people at all levels of library work as well as students. It would provide an essential juxtaposition to the colonial content that makes up the library and information science curriculum and inspire practicing librarians to make changes on individual and institutional levels. This book is eminently readable. I would venture to say that it could be of interest to people outside of librarianship and academia, except that my family's reaction to seeing this book (overwhelmingly judging a book by its cover, or perhaps the subtitle), has proven me wrong. I did assure them that the book was not at all boring.