

# Educational Fabulations: Teaching and Learning for a World Yet to Come

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## *Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage*

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### **Educational Fabulations: Teaching and Learning for a World Yet to Come**

edited by Diane Conrad & Sean Wiebe

Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, 399 pages

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As a teacher-researcher who works with and writes on speculative fiction (SF) and how it can be used to help students examine ideas as diverse as climate justice (Streeby, 2018), othering (Campbell, 2019), and alternate possible futures (Wolf-Meyer, 2019) I had high expectations for this text. This book introduces the idea of using speculative fiction in an education setting and provides a collection of 28 short stories, separated into six themes, along with study questions and suggested readings for each. The editors describe the 28 stories as “original works of speculative fiction as fiction-based research” (Conrad & Wiebe, 2022, p.1) and provide the introduction chapter as a guide to what that means and how to use these stories. The book can be broken into two sections: the introduction which is an academic look at SF as a tool to speculate on the future of education; and the short stories which form the bulk of the material.

The introduction lays out the theoretical underpinnings of SF as a means of future making and social critique. It is also where the editors define the term “fabulations” that appears in the title as a subgenre of fiction that shows a world radically different than ours in order to confront and critique the real world (Conrad & Wiebe, 2022, p.1). This is

the premise of the text: that speculative texts (such as the included stories) can go where empirically produced evidence cannot, breaking through confirmation bias and engaging held beliefs beyond our unconscious reach (Conrad & Wiebe, 2022, p. 8). The editors begin by asserting their bona fides as true fans of SF, which I think puts the rest of their introduction into perspective: this is not just an academic work, but a passion project. Their explanation of the way SF is a tool for examining the world is sprinkled through with references to well-known pop-culture examples, such as *Blade Runner* and *Fahrenheit 451*, but also discusses Indigenous wisdom traditions and Afrofuturism – providing a diversity of citations that is rarely found in discussion of SF.

The remainder of the volume is organized in six sections, each with four or five stories, titled The Future of Technology in Education, Corporate Interventions in Education, Speculations on Social Issues, Visions for Curricular Futures, The Role of Spirit in Education, and Teaching and Learning with Our More-Than-Human Relations. The stories are what you would expect: most are between twelve and fourteen pages in length and written for a grade 7-12 reading level. There are some which are written in the form of plays, and one that is a series of letters. While some of the stories touch on Indigenous themes there is a notable lack of sustained discussions of Indigenous wisdom traditions, Afrofuturism, or other perspectives despite the introduction. While there are stories that include important topics such as non-binary genders or self-harm, few others focus on such issues in the potential futures they present. This is a book on teaching and learning so the focus on education systems is understandable, but for educators, social justice is intrinsic to all teaching and learning. Topics such as disability education, structural racism, or intersectionality are not explored.

The writing is accessible, and the ideas are well supported with recent research, citing multiple texts from the past decade. Despite the rest of the material being fiction-based research and study questions, the editors do not provide detailed guidance on how an educator can use this provided material. While the introduction provides plenty of interesting material for me as a researcher familiar with speculative pedagogies, I feel that this limits the volume's potential reach. Language teachers who have the tools necessary to integrate the material into their classes might find the text useful, but SF can be used in all curriculum areas. Were more of the text dedicated to practical tips to using what is discussed within it would find a wider audience.

Speculative fiction, as a way to “to mark what otherwise goes unmarked in everydayness” (Dokumaci, 2018, para. 5), is a powerful tool. It makes the familiar strange (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010) and allows for new perspectives. The introduction of this text is a good primer for newcomers to this approach, but it lacks concrete directions or strategies a teacher could implement to add SF to their repertoire. The 28 short stories provide the bulk of the text and can be used in different lessons, but even with the included study questions an educator new to using SF might struggle to implement the approach if this was their only guide. For someone with some experience using SF texts in this way the collection could be a useful resource.

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