

Book Review

Reclaiming Indigenous Research in Higher Education

Robin Starr Minthorn and Heather J. Shotton
New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018

Reviewed by: Jon Reyhner
Northern Arizona University

This book is an outgrowth of presentations at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education held in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 2014 and titled “Igniting a Movement of International Indigenous Higher Education Scholars in the Academy.” In its 13 chapters the contributors provided a variety of studies, including of doctoral students and university web sites. There is a chapter by a tribal college president. Bryan Brayboy, the President’s Professor of Indigenous Education at Arizona State University in Phoenix, Arizona, began his Foreword to this volume with a quotation from Vine Deloria, Jr.’s 1969 book *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*: “Academia, and its by-products, continues to become more irrelevant to the needs of people” (p. ix). In response, the contributors emphasized how university research needs to contribute to Indigenous “nation building” (p. 22) and “benefit our communities” (p. 208).

The various authors built on past work of Indigenous scholars, especially as found in Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012) and Shawn Wilson’s *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008). The contributors emphasized researchers’ responsibility to the group versus research being just an individual quest, and they emphasized the need for getting beyond a deficit perspective and acknowledging the need for reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships. As Adrienne Keene wrote in chapter 4, “In many ways, Indigenous methods are ‘just good research,’ but they also constitute a level of responsibility, accountability, and commitment that many non-Native researchers may not be able to understand” (p. 51). Citing Wilson, Natalie Youngbull wrote in chapter 9, “Through an Indigenous paradigm, knowledge is not created or owned; rather, it is relational and shared” (p. 128).

In the lead chapter entitled “The Need for Indigenizing Research in Higher Education Scholarship,” Charlotte Davidson, Heather Shotton, Robin Minthorn, and Stephanie Waterman noted that they and other “Indigenous scholars do not ignore or dismiss Western epistemologies,” however, they interpret them through their own lenses (p. 16). Adrienne Keene wrote in chapter 4 how “[r]esearch has often been the tool of colonialism, offering justifications for policies of assimilation and cultural eradication” (p. 50), and Sweeney Windchief commented in chapter 6 on the incidental and passive assimilation faced by Indigenous students in academia today. Theresa Stewart remarked in chapter 7 on the “dehumanizing nature of education” (p. 88) and she was echoed in chapter 9 by Natalie Youngbull who examined the support Indigenous students need as they face “feelings of invisibility and/or isolation and a lack

of sense of belonging on campus” and experience “marginalization and alienation” (p. 127).

In the concluding chapter, the editors summed up that “Indigenous research is imperative to healing our communities and fostering our overall well-being” (p. 210). They noted also the importance of “honoring our collective voices” and entering “our writing space with good thoughts and intentions.” They remarked on the “fluid” nature of “Indigenous methodologies” and say that there is “not a singular approach to Indigenous methodologies” (pp. 207-208).

This collection of essays is important for anyone with an interest in current Indigenous perspectives on higher education and research. In chapter 13, Pearl Brower, president of Iġisagvik College, the only tribal college in Alaska, provided a list of traditional Inupiaq values to live by, including when doing research, that include sharing, knowledge of language, cooperation, humility, and respect. Similar lists can be found for many other groups of Indigenous peoples, and I would argue that these values should be central to any scholarly pursuit.

References

- Deloria, Jr., V. (1969). *Custer died for your sins: An Indian manifesto*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (Second Edition). London, United Kingdom; New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Winnipeg, Canada: Fernwood.

Jon Reyhner is a Professor Education at Northern Arizona University. He previously taught Navajo junior high school students and was an elementary school administrator on the Havasupai, Blackfeet, Navajo, and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservations. His books include *American Indian Education: A History* and *Teaching Indigenous Students: Honoring Place, Community, and Culture*.