

Journal of American Indian Education

Volume 38 Number 2
Winter 1999

BOOK REVIEW

Swisher, Karen Gayton and Tippeconic III, John W., Editors. (1999) *Next Steps, Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (317 pages)

The book, *Next Steps, Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*, provides essential and current information for not only students in teacher education programs but anyone concerned about the welfare of American Indian children. It is an edited collection of writings of Native scholars with a preface and final chapter written by the editors. The book has four parts: The Past and Present Foundations of Indian Education; Curriculum Issues, Thoughts and Practice; The College and University Experience; and The Next Steps. In the preface, the editors, Karen Swisher and John Tippeconic III, describe each section, noting that the primary audience of their work is intended to be students and teachers in college and university classrooms. The writings of fourteen American Indian scholars are featured in their book.

The book was not intended to be comprehensive, yet, the approach is holistic. The various authors provide pertinent information about the American Indian student, his/her family, schooling, resources and opportunities. Unlike most information on American Indian education, the book is enriched with chapters on social work and federal education case law and legislation. To reinforce this holistic approach, Swisher and Tippeconic, in their chapter "Research to Support Improved Practice in Indian Education," note that "Schooling is often viewed as separate from other institutions that

impact us daily. More connections need to be made between schooling and the other critical settings in daily life."(p. 305) This book does exactly that by drawing together the various connections associated with contemporary American Indian education.

The first significant theme that permeates and connects all the chapters is *self-determination*. The self-determination Act of 1975 provided the opportunity for American Indian Nations to take control of their own welfare, including education. In his chapter, "Tribal Control of American Indian Education: Observations Since the 1960's with Implications for the Future," John Tippeconnic III provides highly relevant observations about the meaning and significance of tribal control of schools. In his view, a critical junction on the road toward self-determination has been the establishment and proliferation of tribal colleges. He notes that the responsibilities and functions of the tribal college boards of trustees demonstrate a major achievement that moves the concept of self-determination beyond education. Another contributing author, Wayne J. Stein in "Tribal Colleges: 1968-1998," echoes this assertion, adding, "Indian decision-making entities (including tribal governing councils) must seek the approval of the Secretary of the Interior for their important decisions; tribal college boards of trustees do not."(p. 264) In the view of these authors, the thirty-one tribal colleges are true enactments and models of self-determination.

The second significant theme of this book relates to the powerful impact of "deficit theory" in education and the manner in which it has affected American Indians. In her probing chapter in Part I, "The Unnatural History of American Indian Education," Tsianina Lomawaima, exhorts educators to be aware of the practices and theory they implement because of the legacies of colonial education that gave rise to and continue to support

deficit practices. Although deficit theory has been discredited academically through practices adopted related to culturally appropriate curriculum, counseling, assessment, attention to the school environment of Indian students, and empowerment strategies engendered through the collaboration of social work, deficit treatment of students remains insidious and pervasive.

Following Lomaiwaima's entreaties about deficit theory, the issues in Part II and III of the book turn toward sensitivity to American Indian students' cultures and sense of reality in the classroom. In the Chapter, "Student Assessment in Indian Education or What is a Roach?" Sandra Fox advocates the use of performance based testing as an alternative and a more equitable form of assessment for American Indian students. All states are required to have performance based assessment systems in place by the school year 2000-2001. Fox describes the recently adopted Learning Record by the Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools. The Learning Record is a performance based testing system that involves not only the student, but also parents and teachers in the assessment.

Utilizing the 1997 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Michael Pavel in his Chapter, "American Indians and Alaska Natives in Higher Education: Promoting Access and Achievement" provides recent information on American Indian student enrollment and performance. He suggests that instead trying to "fix the student" ala the deficit hypothesis, educators should instead be examining school and environmental attributes that determine the quality of schooling American Indian receive through their K-12 experience"(p.242).

In her chapter, "Effective Counseling with American Indian Students," Deborah Wetsit explores the need for schools to utilize Indian community resources and traditional

healing. In discussing counseling strategies she notes the significance of cultural information such as tribal kinship relationships. She emphasizes that so much of what we consider universal for American Indian students is often very culture specific (p. 185).

As a collection of writings by recognized Native scholars, *Next Steps, Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*, provides valuable insight into the important issues surrounding the American Indian student and school. Collectively, the contributors outline some of the most important influences on the lives of American Indians as students: the unique status of American Indian nations in their relationship to the United States Government, the history of oppression, and the imposition of a curriculum designed to assimilate Indian people. The book also provides a critical review of literature including such topics as Indian education, social work, counseling, legal issues, and history.

Although the title implies a focus on research, and the editors call for more research based strategies, the book falls short in presenting *new* research or in defining a sound future research agenda. Because rigorous research in Indian education has been sparse, research for research sake in Indian education must be viewed cautiously. Greg Cajete in his contribution, "The Native American Learner and Bicultural Science Education," goes to the heart of the matter in warning us that "The scientific rationalistic viewpoint has become an integral part of the American education structure. This viewpoint has become so ingrained in the psyche that most Americans view reality in no other way(p.144)." Bolstered by Cajete's injunction, it is this reviewer's opinion that unless a sense of American Indian reality becomes imbued in theory and research approaches, knowledge gleaned from most research as we now know it will only reinforce deficit

theories and support those stereotypes ingrained in education concerning American Indians.

As an Indian educator and scholar, I felt that the book did not provide substantially new information to merit its title, *Next Steps, Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*. Linda Skinner's chapter, "Teaching Through Traditions: Incorporating Languages and Culture into Curricula," was originally submitted as a commissioned paper to the *Indian Nations At Risk Task Force* (condensed for this book) and published approximately ten years ago. Although the information is still relevant, it does not provide *current* information on exemplary programs and current successful strategies. On the other hand, this reviewer was tantalized by the notion that education can be understood and practiced from a native perspective. Although Greg Cajete takes the reader a meaningful step or two in this direction, the concluding chapter of the book, "Next Steps," does not deliver in terms of drawing us more substantively in the direction of this promising and vital theme.

The greatest merit of the book is that the contributors are all American Indian scholars writing on theoretical and practical topics. It supports the endeavors of Indian tribal self-determination and, in spite of its shortcomings in the realm of truly recent information, serves as an excellent guide and source of relevant information. It belongs on the shelves of educators, researchers, tribal leaders and other professionals concerned with Native issues.

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