

Book Review

American Indian/First Nations Schooling: From the Colonial Period to the Present

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American Indian/First Nations Schooling: From the Colonial Period to the Present is Charles L. Glenn's analysis of the schooling of the North American Indian through an educational policy and administration perspective. While the title implies a chronological outline of Indian education, each chapter title presents a particular subject within Indian education, while the chapter explores the historical background with regard to the subject.

Within the preface of the book, Glenn identifies himself as an educational policy and administration specialist, a participant in the 1960s social justice movement, and a former government official, all of which inform his historical perspective on American Indian education. While I appreciated this professional introduction to Glenn, I found the author's perspective to be highly controversial, and will likely astound American Indian scholars sensitive to the historical and ongoing miseducation of American Indians. In particular, I raise issue with a number of problematic assertions in the book regarding Indian identity, the social, cultural and educational outcomes of residential, missionary, and boarding schools, and finally Glenn's "ideal world" regarding Indian education. I address each of these points in the review that follows.

My contention with the book has nothing to do with the research that Glenn conducted. The book effectively presents the various, often-opposing perspectives of the purpose of Indian education, from government agents, tribal leaders, and general educators (including missionary, residential, and boarding school educators), giving appropriate space

to each view. I also appreciated the identification of several different problems within Indian education, including inner group divisiveness, differing opinions on the appropriateness of tribal culture and language in the curriculum, and funding issues. However, Glenn's analysis and conclusions offer superficial solutions, in the process criticizing American Indians, while rationalizing the motives of educators. Largely this is due to a misunderstanding of identity, an issue with which I believe rural educators and researchers will empathize.

Identity

In order to understand my critique of Glenn's analysis, an understanding of Native identity is important. Faircloth and Tippeconnic III (2011) explain that Native identity is tied to the place one comes from. This place is not so much geographical in nature, but rather is epistemological, in which language, culture, and place of origin, within the context of historical experiences, shape one's identity (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2011). Within the book, Glenn never explores this definition of identity, but instead challenges the notions of those who insist on its importance and significance in understanding Indian education.

Within the concluding chapter, Glenn argues that over time a pan-Indian identity has emerged, an identity borne of a shared historical experience of persecution and marginalization at the hands of the (White) majority society, transcending specific tribal identities and cultures. Glenn argues however that it is the professionals working directly with ethnic minority students, including teachers, social workers, community organizers, ethnic elected and appointed officials, and professors and researchers specializing in minority language and culture, who are complicit in producing and promoting a continued separation

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from the “host” society (p. 197). In particular, he argues that these individuals become “experts in the ‘manipulation of the symbolic, the instrumental, and the affective’ and, in so doing, “may themselves achieve a high level of participation in the host society while depending on the continued existence of a group of followers who are precisely not integrated” (p. 197).

Glenn states that those who insist on the importance of identity are activists who make it “their business to be accepted as ethnic leaders or spokesmen” while profiting from their “direct stake in the continuing existence of a distinct minority community” (p. 197). For most who identify with any of the above professions, this criticism of career motives is not new. However, in Glenn’s argument that “attempts to define the appropriate education for all Indians have been profoundly misguided” (p. 195), one cannot ignore the contradiction in his assertion that the bulk of the responsibility for the underachievement of all Indians is due to advocacy efforts of all ethnic leaders or spokespeople, especially when Glenn devotes nearly 200 pages exploring the numerous theoretical and practical errors made over centuries, by multiple people with various identities.

I am in complete agreement with Glenn’s argument that basing an entire pedagogy on or organizing schools around these generalizations of an Indian identity is disconcerting since this is likely to perpetuate inaccurate and damaging stereotypes of Indian students as intellectually inferior (p.194 - 195). However, Glenn makes the case that it is the fault of this generalized Indian identity that produces these racially-based stereotypes of intellectual inferiority (p. 195). This placement of blame upon identity is Glenn’s biggest misperception of Indian education, and one that has historically been made by non-Native educators and researchers. In reference to the historical treatment of American Indian children, Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc state, “School officials attempted to peel away layers of Indian identity, working from the outside into the hearts and minds of Native American children. . . but the inner deconstruction of Indian identity proved a much more complicated task, often impossible” (2006, p. 17). The insistence that identity does not matter is one of the continuous mistakes made throughout the history of Indian education. American Indian identity within and of itself is not the problem. Identity becomes problematic when it is in the hands of researchers and scholars who do not completely understand the true meaning and integral importance of this identity to those who claim it. From my perspective, I would identify the real issue of American Indian education and Indian identity as an overdependence upon myths offering a “single best way to teach Indian students, a myth that is perpetuated to make educators’ lives easier, at the

cost of oversimplifying the needs of American Indian students (Lomawaima and McCarty, 2002, p. 22).

Outcomes of Residential, Boarding, and Missionary Schools

This misunderstanding of identity extends to Glenn’s desire to identify the positive exceptions within the schooling experience of American Indians. Glenn states, “the boarding school experience is and has always been painful to many youth, including those attending elite independent schools in England or the United States and there were features of the Indian residential school – cultural dislocation, language change, physical labor – that made them especially difficult for many, but surely some of the indictments are excessive” (p. 99). The large volume of historical research accounting for American Indian schooling experiences can be better understood if the definition of Native people’s identity is taken into consideration. “To know where one is going is to know where one has been. The past in turn shapes who one is in the present” (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2010, p. 183). It is not the point of these historical studies to dissuade Indian people from pursuing education, or to serve as an indictment against the institution of education. While Glenn asserts that these indictments appear to be excessive, there is a need to keep this narrative within our consciousness to ensure that this legacy never becomes a reality again. Rather, as Glenn exhibits through the testimonies of American Indian leaders about the purpose of education and the responsibility of teaching tribal language and culture, there is a strong desire to amend these atrocities, and find a successful method to educate American Indian students.

In addition to this comment, Glenn makes several attempts to ameliorate the narrative about the schooling experience in chapters eight and nine, noting, that the experience ultimately helped to create “leaders with a pan-Indian identity” (p. 80). This is all compounded by a statement in which Glenn cites Wilson’s contention that “However dismal the record of church-run Indian schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it remains a fact that most of today’s Indian-rights leaders are products of those very schools...which educated young Indians about one another and politicized them about their place in the larger society” (Wilson, as cited in Glenn, 2012, p. 104). This positioning assumes that the ways in which these leaders lead are direct outcomes of residential, boarding, and missionary schools, but fails to consider that these skills may have been obtained from Native ways of knowing. Even if Glenn does not acknowledge Native ways of knowing as legitimate sources of knowledge, and supports only

Western conceptions of leadership, one would have to conclude that leaders are born, not made, which still gives credence to American Indians, and not the school system.

The most problematic issue with Glenn's analysis about Indian leaders is that it does not take into consideration whether American Indian leaders themselves would attribute their skills to these educational institutions. The fact is troublesome that neither Glenn nor his reference source, Wilson, reference American Indian leaders' autobiographies regarding schooling experience. This oversight leads to gross assumptions about the origin of American Indian leadership. AIM co-founder Dennis Banks' (2005) *Ojibwe Warrior* details the feelings of remorse of not being able to speak his Anishinaabe language. AIM activist Mary Crow Dog's (1991) *Lakota Woman* describes the St. Francis boarding school as a "family curse" (p. 31). Exploration into other autobiographies of AIM leaders will likely voice the exact narrative of Indian schooling that Glenn perceives as being "excessive," which is likely why they are not included.

Indian Education in an "Ideal World"

In the first chapter, Glenn outlines the demographic and census statistics of American Indian people. He uses these data to demonstrate that the United States and Canada have been unable to find a "formula" to ensure the full participation of American Indian people within society. Glenn goes on to say, "In an ideal world, perhaps, Indian youth would be so educated that at adolescence, they could make a reasoned choice about whether to continue to speak their ancestral language and to follow their ancestral customs on the basis of the worldview of their ancestors or to turn their back on all of those and plunge wholeheartedly into the majority society and culture..." (p. 7).

From an American Indian standpoint, it is important to listen to Vine Deloria Jr.'s warning, "Individual self-determination and intellectual sovereignty are scary concepts because they mean that a whole generation of Indians are not going to be responsible to the Indian people, they are simply going to be isolated individuals playing with symbols of Indians" (as cited by Pulitano, 2003, p. 72). It is not as simple as merely turning one's back. There is significance of Indian identity that extends beyond claiming and upholding the values of what it means to be Indian. From the centuries of American Indian education, we should finally acknowledge that there is an inextricable link between Indian individuals, tribal communities, and Indian identity that cannot be parsed.

Throughout the book, Glenn showcases how this erroneous "ideal world" has been perpetuated and

ingrained into the institution of Indian education. Just as Theobald and Wood (2011) argue that rural students learn that one must go to the city to find success, Indian students have suffered from the insistence that they must become White to be successful. However, as time has shown, this ideal world is not satisfactory for American Indian students or White society. Glenn never challenges the notion that perhaps this world is not ideal at all. Instead he insists that the only policy suggestion for this "sad" history, is to give families the possibility of school choice (p. 198).

For rural communities, it is important to see how researchers (mis)perceive identity and education. From Glenn's book, we can see how those unfamiliar with identity, in this case American Indian identity, can simultaneously exaggerate and understate the impact of identity, which leads to a cycle of erroneous practice and policy. Glenn's ideal world does not take into consideration the interlinking relationship of these identities that can never be parted, despite devoting chapter nine to exploring how American Indians have been unable to integrate into White society or remain within their tribal community. Furthermore, Glenn does not explore the phenomenon found amongst American Indian students who accept the social responsibility to return to and serve their tribal communities (Brayboy, 2005), a phenomenon that has become increasingly important for American Indian communities dependent upon educated American Indians to advocate for their community needs (Brayboy, 2005). If these individuals have indeed "turned their backs" (p. 7), what does that mean for Indian communities striving for progress and community improvement through the forms of self-determination and tribal sovereignty?

For rural educators, it is understood that schools hold social, cultural, and economic significance to their local community (Schafft, 2010). American Indians, through education, strive to achieve this balance between school success and community improvement. Historically, researchers, policy makers and educators have pushed this "ideal world" upon American Indian communities, making them choose between individual academic success or community improvement, and as a result created a system of education that has not served American Indians well, either as individuals assimilating in the "host society" or as communities.

Final Thoughts

I applaud Glenn's desire to find the exceptions in a period of education that is marked by emotion and pain (Sasz, 2006). I truly wish that he were successful in this endeavor. However, Glenn's analysis often comes off as insensitive and misinformed. It is not my argument that these misperceptions stem from malice,

but this does not excuse or void the impact that these misguided conclusions offer. I agree with many of the points Glenn makes in his book. However, without my prior knowledge of American Indian research, I wonder what erroneous conclusions I would have been in agreement with. It is in the hands of readers who are not as well versed in the literature that I find the book to be most troubling, especially since he articulates how these flawed misperceptions have hindered progress in American Indian education. Rather than deconstructing these misperceptions, Glenn's opinions fall in line with centuries of misunderstanding American Indian people and the significance of identity within Indian communities and our education system.

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