



Education Review

Reseñas Educativas

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July 14, 2021

ISSN 1094-5296

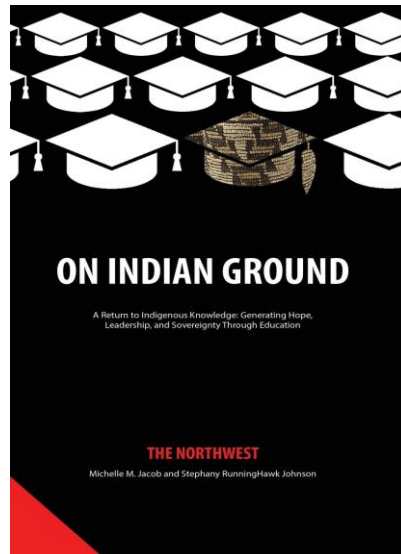
Jacob, M., & RunningHawk Johnson, S. (2020). *On Indian ground: The Northwest*. Information Age Publishing.

Pp. 290

ISBN: 978-1641139007

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Focusing on American Indian communities in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, Michelle Jacob and Stephany Runninghawk – editors of *On Indian Ground: The Northwest* – make space for topics that span all levels of education in these United States. The book is second of 10 books in the series, *On Indian Ground: A Return to Indigenous Knowledge: Generating Hope, Leadership, and Sovereignty Through Education*. Each book provides deep insights into educational issues affecting Indigenous people in specific regions. The book's cover, depicting 15 graduation caps and only one with a native design, illustrates the disproportionate statistics of Indigenous students who graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education. The lone cap, nonetheless, conveys a sense of hope that there will be more graduates as the 21st century moves forward.



This edited volume includes contributions from academic scholars as well as community members such as elders and tribal leaders. These contributions interweave the importance of maintaining Indigenous culture and history while engaging in the dominant American culture. The foreword begins with a speech by a tribal chairman at a State Indian Education Association conference, offering perspectives as to why education is important to Indigenous peoples, thus highlighting the importance of collaborations with community members to honor the value of balancing the demands of formal education with Indigenous traditions. Jacob (2013) acknowledges how elders teach the younger generation and how knowledge is shared through stories, language, examples, practice, and encouragement. By beginning the book with the voice of a tribal chairman, the editors acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge.

The book chapters address issues within Indian education in each of the four states, such as how to incorporate math and science when teaching Indigenous students, a teacher preparation program, and language revitalization. Tary Tobin, for example, a research associate at the University of Oregon, makes connections between the past and current policies as she covers intersecting topics like boarding schools, tribal colleges, state Indian Education Associations, funding, and other education practices. Tobin argues that Indian education is critical for ensuring that all students have access to learning about American Indian history, culture, and current issues as opposed to “academic instruction provided to Native students” (p. 16).

In addition to practitioner voices, the book includes student perspectives about higher education. It is important to make note of their success stories as American Indian students are understudied at the national level, primarily because the numbers are too small to be viewed as “statistically significant” (Shotton et al., 2013). Success does not always have to come in the form of high test scores or university degrees. Success may be “the connection rather than competition, culturally grounded, and yet still acknowledges the systematic barriers created by settler colonialism” (p. 22). For example, one student shared her experiences learning how to tan hides and to make flutes and drums. She viewed it as her way of connecting with the community as well as making money. Reading about student perceptions helps contextualize the damage caused by deficit models and schools’ emphases on assimilation. The students’ stories can illuminate ways to “combine indigenous notions of culture, knowledge, and power with western/European conceptions in order to actively engage in survivance, self-determination, and tribal autonomy” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 437).

Although the primary focus of *On Indian Ground* is on American Indian education, some chapters focus on culturally appropriate teacher education and teacher preparation and post-secondary school transitions for students with disabilities. For example, Hobie Blackhorn highlights the importance of improving transition services for American Indian students with disabilities beyond secondary education. American Indian students make up only a fraction of the student population throughout the United States, yet they are one of the groups most likely to be identified as needing special education services (p. 69). Disproportionality of students in special education has been consistently observed for boys, immigrants, and Indigenous groups (Cooc & Kiru, 2018). This book stresses the value of incorporating culturally relevant transition practices in education as a counterpoint to these concerning trends. Similarly, scholars such as McCarty and Lee (2014) found that American Indian/Alaskan Native students who took part in culturally sustainability/revitalizing pedagogy connected to their culture in more meaningful ways, resulting in better performance on state assessments.

In one chapter, using an interview format, Rosiek & Snyder discuss the creation of a teacher preparation program, reflect on American Indian student experiences, and incorporate cultural perspectives such as mentoring, research experiences, and peer interactions. The University of Oregon Sapsik™alá Teacher Education Program is specifically geared for Native students who aspire to become teachers in Indigenous communities and allows students to create an Indigenous space at an

institution in Oregon. The program is designed for Indigenous students to develop their own identities as Indigenous educators as they work with Indigenous faculty.

As a Navajo educator from Arizona who has spent most of her career focused on special education challenges, I am excited to read other books within the series. This book uncovered many Indigenous educational challenges not currently discussed widely or known to the general public. While issues are similar to those I observe and confront in the Southwest, I learned of issues unique to the Northwest, such as the Oregon teacher preparation program designed specifically for American Indians students and the language revitalization efforts within the Yakima Ichishkín community. Through my 14 years of experience in the field, I have found that Native communities often get stuck in a rut that perpetuates a stressful top-down model. Often, we are encouraged to listen to “non-Natives” tell us how to deliver instruction or provide services to our students. The teacher preparation program presented in this volume has made me question why similar programs do not exist at other institutions. Living in a state that has 22 tribes, I recognize that this type of program would be appropriate for preparing future Native and non-Native educators to work with Native American students. One quote by contributors Adams and Coley especially resonated with me:

Although the schools Native children and grandchildren attend today would be unlikely to admit that they are grounded in assimilationist philosophies and practices, they continue to essentially ignore Native history, intergenerational trauma, Native knowledges and perspectives, and Native student achievement gaps. As such, they could be perceived as continuing to affirm and support settler Eurocentric dominance and superiority (p. 47).

I wholeheartedly agree. Through my experience as an educator who has collaborated with non-Indigenous educators and leaders, I have observed how settler colonialism continues to shape education today and how it purports superiority over Indigenous ways of knowing. This book served as a reminder of why those of us from Indigenous communities must continue to fight the battle to best meet the needs of our Indigenous children in the 21st century.

This book is intended for all individuals who interact with the various populations of American Indian and Native youth in the Northwest region of the United States, including parents, families, community members, education directors, teachers, administrators, elders, and advocates focused on improving opportunities and outcomes for American Indian students (p. x). The readers will learn the history of the states and regions, the politics and laws in the region, tribal departments of education, post-secondary efforts, exceptional student education, curricular choices, and parental and tribal community involvement. Although the book offered many insights about the Northwest, it was difficult to determine the logic behind the sequencing of the volume after the first three chapters because the topics and context varied from chapter to chapter. Further, given the discussions of so many diverse topics, I wanted to learn more about some of the challenges presented. For example, more information on the disproportionality of students in special education in the Northwest region would have been beneficial. Nonetheless, the book serves as

an important contribution to understanding educational opportunities for Indigenous people.

Two common themes are woven throughout the chapters: the need to honor and maintain American Indian history and culture and the importance of incorporating historical and cultural lessons within daily teachings that use Indigenous ways of knowing. In addition to learning about the complex history of American Indian people, it is imperative for teachers to know there are 567 tribes and more than 300 different reservations in the United States. Previous texts on Indian education portray American Indians as though they are all the same. In contrast, this book – like others in the series – provides a more nuanced lens on how to work with American Indians within the Northwest. The chapters of this book are filled with examples on how to approach challenges that are relevant across any educational setting. As such, I recommend this book for all educators – teachers, administrators, and school board members – regardless of location.

Despite the traditional historical narratives that engage in the erasure and essentializing of our experiences, we, as Indigenous people, are still here making ourselves known. We are relevant, complex, and want to contribute our Indigenous ways of knowing to all, including those who have been primed to only acknowledge the Western canon. Jacob and RunningHawk edited a collection of chapters from Indigenous scholars and community members who uphold their people's values and offer important insights into the U.S. education system.

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## About the Reviewer

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