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Education's Histories

methodological grist for the
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Notes

¹ Adrea Lawrence, "Epic Learning in an Indian Pueblo: A Framework for Studying Multigenerational Learning in the History of Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (August 2014), 290.

² Adrea Lawrence, KuuNUx TeeRIt Kroupa, and Donald Warren, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 254.

Questions of Methodology: A Review of the August 2014 *History of Education Quarterly* Special Issue

Abigail Gundlach-Graham

When we begin to consider Indigenous stories and acknowledge "that divergent epistemological beliefs and practices exist between Indigenous and Euroamerican groups, the premise of the question of 'what is education' necessarily shifts from definitional to methodological: How do we recognize it when we see it?"¹ In this essay, I look particularly at the methodological implications of the three articles and six responses that constitute the August 2014 *History of Education Quarterly* (HEQ) thematic issue about American Indian education, in which this quotation from Adrea Lawrence appears.

According to its introduction, the goal of the issue is to "conceptually, substantively and methodologically . . . examine American-Indian histories and demonstrate how they might further the field of the history of education."² American Indian education history challenges the methods, periodization, and topical distinctions of history focusing on Euroamericans. The essays explicitly argue that American Indian education history enriches the narratives of U.S. history broadly, but they also imply that dealing with the challenges of researching Indigenous history also enrich

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historians' methodologies in ways that are transferrable to other topics. The methods that best fit research with or about American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and First Nations peoples (and Indigenous peoples around the world) may not be appropriate for any individual project with another topic, but the examples provided in the special issue suggest that "traditional" research methods aren't sufficient either. Together, the essays also critique the field of education history, promote multidisciplinary, and introduce a variety of important questions.

Lawrence and Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy remind us that education is power, and that conflicting understandings of education have real consequences to those who hold them. For example, Euroamerican colonizers preferred curricula that were not spatially specific, but organized according to chronological time, while for many Indigenous people, "place was the grounding focal point of cosmology, history, and morality."³ Research, which involves the creation and control of knowledge, is also power. Historians of Indigenous education must therefore cope with different understandings of education, of time and place, and of social responsibility. In his essay, Donald Warren comments on "multiple and different ways of sensing" and intends to "weigh the conceptual and methodological effects of American Indian histories on the history of education."⁴ Methodological concerns are thus central to—intertwined with—subject, reliability, and the resulting narratives. How do we balance the interests of Euroamerican "mainstream" academia and Indigenous communities? How do education historians avoid suggesting that Indigenous people have static worldviews and identities while accounting for epistemological differences?

Studying the history of education in Indigenous contexts is a relational endeavor that involves reflexive and collaborative approaches. As the work of the thematic *HEQ* issue acknowledges, some of the questions underlying such efforts relate to identity: How appropriate is it for non-Indigenous people to do this research? To what extent should they (we) make efforts to do research grounded in Indigenous epistemologies?

Importantly, Warren emphasizes that scholarly research about Indigenous education inherently has both Indigenous and Euroamerican cultural elements: Indigenous subjects and context, and

³ Adrea Lawrence, "Epic Learning in an Indian Pueblo: A Framework for Studying Multigenerational Learning in the History of Education," *ibid.*, 288.

⁴ Donald Warren, "American Indian Histories as Education History," *ibid.*, 256.

Euroamerican expectations for research presentation. Thus, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers will encounter multiple epistemologies and standards of conduct, although they will be more comfortable with different portions of the research and presentation process. I find this reassuring, and understand it to particularly encourage collaboration, so that we can acknowledge our personal points of comfort/familiarity and discomfort/unfamiliarity, and address them as people and as researchers. Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert introduces a related consideration. He explains that Indigenous researchers tend to privilege their groups' worldview, but sometimes non-Indigenous audiences don't understand or accept such work. So, he argues, Indigenous people have a continued obligation to clarify for scholarly audiences their worldviews and contributions to the study of education and history.

This collection of essays begins to challenge the impression that non-Indigenous (primarily Euroamerican) scholars are the masters of the academic disciplines—including education history—and they occasionally and gratefully receive “help” from Indigenous people. Instead, these authors suggest that we need a reconstruction of (power) relationships within the field and between historians of education and other experts to incorporate the epistemological complexity of Indigenous research methodologies. Perhaps what is really needed is to acknowledge that Indigenous people have long created histories of education—a challenge to Euroamerican scholars in academia and to the concept of academic disciplines themselves. In part, this requires seeking both primary and secondary sources that reinforce this work, and recognizing as colleagues those Indigenous experts working outside of academia, such as Elders, community leaders, educators, and activists.

Warren, Lawrence, and KuuNUx TeeRIt Kroupa, the authors of the *HEQ* articles, do not delve deeply into specifics of research methodologies, but instead focus on the argument that our methodological choices have substantial effects on resulting arguments and narratives. If we take these essays as a starting point, the ensuing discussion needs to attend more to issues of evidence—to compatibilities and incompatibilities among types of sources, issues of validity, types of trust, relationships inherent to the research process, and responsibilities to multiple audiences.

Nevertheless, they and their responders mention that oral traditions reveal Indigenous perspectives in a way that documentary sources cannot. They are reliable, epistemologically rich, and educationally consequential in themselves. But the new work extends beyond source choices, into conceptions of history and education themselves. Kroupa provides an Arikara example demonstrating that Indigenous histories do not cease at some point in the past, and that contemporary institutions—in his essay, an Arikara Medicine Lodge and other cultural revitalization projects—have a place in education history research.

Yesenia Lucia Cervera provides this effective summary of a point that appears in Lawrence’s article: “because basic concepts, such as time and place, have different meanings for different cultural groups, contextualizing historical episodes requires understanding historical actors’ cultures and worldviews.”⁵ Academic theories tend to generalize, and we must consider particular cultural groups within their own contexts. Relatedly, Kroupa’s article leads Gilbert to emphasize that it is not sufficient for historians of education (or, I imagine, other researchers in the social sciences and humanities) to consider policy and theories of colonialism, racism, and related concerns, but we must also “think more broadly and ask questions directly related to a particular Indigenous group.”⁶

The *HEQ* issue incorporates multiple disciplinary perspectives and literatures and introduces unresolved problems and questions. Warren challenges the very boundaries of the field of education history, writing, “Pushed inductively, education history becomes more essentially a family of methods than a topical jurisdiction.”⁷ Methodologies, definitions of education, and understandings of the field are intertwined here, as they should be. Indeed, Cervera shows, through a historiographic review, that the study of American Indian education history, as it is done in our field today, comes more out of the radical revisionist movement than the cultural revisionist movement. Thus, research has focused on imposed schooling—the social control of marginalized people—not on diverse types of education.⁸ While such studies are valuable, they are insufficient; the work represented by this special issue incorporates ideas from both cultural and radical revisionism.⁹

Education is revealed in Indigenous natural sciences, spirituality, arts, social relationships, and

⁵ Yesenia Lucia Cervera, “Negotiating the History of Education: How the Histories of Indigenous Education Expand the Field,” *ibid.*, 379.

⁶ Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, “A Second Wave of Hopi Migration,” *ibid.*, 356.

⁷ Donald Warren, “American Indian Histories as Education History,” *ibid.*, 259.

⁸ Yesenia Lucia Cervera, “Negotiating the History of Education: How the Histories of Indigenous Education Expand the Field,” *ibid.*, 371.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 375.

medicine; together, the authors assert that education historians will be more competent and comprehensive researchers if we resist the Euroamerican imposition of discrete disciplines. Warren, for example, constructs a list of “needed disciplines” from which “researchers synthesize leads”: anthropology, archaeology, history, folklore, oral traditions, genetics, demography, plant biology, economics, and statistics.¹⁰ K. Tsianina Lomawaima writes that despite all of the source and methodology recommendations made in the *HEQ* issue, an important question is neglected: “How do scholars build a culture that values and rewards interdisciplinarity: reading, thinking, and writing across boundaries?”¹¹

For this collection to be most valuable, we have to accept that it suggests many, many questions, even some that the authors don’t explicitly or intentionally introduce. Warren and Lawrence’s articles repeatedly ask the questions: What is education? How do we recognize it, how do we find it? Kroupa’s asks, “If pre-contact Native people engaged in education, what did they seek to transmit? How so? How can scholars unearth American Indian learning processes?” And he introduces “a fundamental question: When did American education begin?”¹² Gilbert asks a question in the context of his own research, but well suited to guide methodology in other Indigenous studies: “Is there a Hopi way of understanding what happened to the Hopi people? And if so, why does this matter?”¹³ I would amend the question to ask: What Hopi ways exist for understanding events? Finally, Gilbert also asks the question guiding my own reading of the issue and the writing of this essay: “How can historians apply what the authors of this special issue have suggested to change the way historians construct and interpret Indian education narratives?”¹⁴ In a sense, the preceding questions aren’t meant to be answered, nor should they be neglected in any education history study.

Some potential answers, as well as some additional questions, arise from consideration of the authors’ language. The issue’s introduction, however, indicates that the authors want to avoid an emphasis on terminology.¹⁵ On the surface, this sounds reasonable. Unfortunately, it masks some of the discrepancies among the essays and neglects the significance of definitions and word choice in a few instances.

¹⁰ Donald Warren, “American Indian Histories as Education History,” *ibid.*, 267-268.

¹¹ K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “History without Silos, Ignorance Versus Knowledge, Education Beyond Schools,” *ibid.*, 351.

¹² KuuNUx TeeRIIt Kroupa, “Education as Arikara Spiritual Renewal and Cultural Evolution,” *ibid.*, 305.

¹³ Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, “A Second Wave of Hopi Migration,” *ibid.*, 358.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 358.

¹⁵ Adrea Lawrence, KuuNUx TeeRIIt Kroupa, and Donald Warren, “Introduction,” *ibid.*, 253.

Importantly, although the terms “Indigenous peoples” and “Natives” are used, the issue is undeniably focused on American Indians. What does it mean that Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and First Nations peoples are mostly left out? If the point of the *HEQ* special issue is theoretical—about what this research adds to our understanding of U.S. history or education—why limit the subjects to American Indians instead of Indigenous peoples more broadly?

The use of the term and concept of colonialism is also worth mentioning. For example, Warren casually uses the phrase “from colonial times forward.”¹⁶ But the nature of this kind of research is such that we must notice and examine enduring colonialism; in other words, we are in “colonial times.” Lawrence, interestingly, acknowledges Office of Indian Affairs Superintendent Clara D. True’s position in 1909 as simultaneously colonizer and critic of colonial mentality.¹⁷ To me, the connection to today’s historians studying Indigenous pasts is clear: many of us are doing the same, and perhaps from an even more privileged position.

Throughout the special issue, there is an undercurrent of struggling to understand the meaning of education. As especially Brayboy and Lawrence argue, the definition of education is not stable or universal; it is contested, adaptable, and culturally central.¹⁸ Cervera, in her review, introduces two of the definitions of education that have grounded the field since the 1960s: Bernard Bailyn’s—“the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across generations”—and Lawrence Cremin’s—“the deliberate, systemic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort.”¹⁹ Cervera explains that Bailyn’s was easier to get behind, but Cremin’s was more meaningful and implied that historians of education are important in particular.²⁰

Warren returns to definitional work throughout his article. Within three sentences, he describes education as “attempted cultural adaptations,” “personal, fraught, and experimental,” and “the dynamics in cultural change and continuity and the process that merges them.”²¹ Several pages later, he writes, “Conceptualized as experiments in cultural formation, education served American Indians in their distant pasts as a weapon against disruption and surprise, whatever the causes, and later

¹⁶ Donald Warren, “American Indian Histories as Education History,” *ibid.*, 257.

¹⁷ Adrea Lawrence, “Epic Learning in an Indian Pueblo: A Framework for Studying Multigenerational Learning in the History of Education,” *ibid.*, 286.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 288-298.

¹⁹ Yesenia Lucia Cervera, “Negotiating the History of Education: How the Histories of Indigenous Education Expand the Field,” *ibid.*, 365-366.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Donald Warren, “American Indian Histories as Education History,” *ibid.*, 262.

²² Ibid., 269.

systemic, often savage colonialism.”²² And near the end of his essay, Warren works on his (and our) understanding of education by beginning with questions:

Who learned what, from whom or what influences, in what context, and with what consequences? The questions rely on a multidimensional concept of education as the thrusting, yet anchoring process amid cultural change, demise, continuity and renewal. Its essential character is experimental, thus lacking guaranteed results.²³

²³ Ibid. 282.

All of his cumulative, complementary characterizations of education demonstrate that learning about American Indian education enriches all of history of education because it helps us address these recurring, fundamental, unresolved questions about the nature of education, its history, and the field.

Nevertheless, there is one quite persuasive argument for paying less attention to terminology and classification. As she did in her 2011 book *Lessons from an Indian Day School*, Lawrence shows that schooling and learning outside of schools are not opposing categories. In this way, her work suggests that we stop worrying about the terminology of education, but look at all the forms and sites of education and how they interact, recognizing that academic subjects are not all that is learned in schools.

The essays of the August 2014 *HEQ* thematic issue present its readers—from undergraduates to senior education historians—with valuable questions without imposing strict methodological rules or taxonomies. It is my hope that these questions provoke and support similarly thoughtful and resourceful studies.

Education's Histories invited Ms. Gundlach-Graham to write this review because of her expertise and methodological innovations in conducting research with Alaska Native peoples. We are grateful for the attention she gave to the *HEQ* special issue on American Indian education history and the careful revisions she made to produce this review.





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