American Indian Historical Experience with Research

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Chippewa Cree
Sources of Knowledge

Ancient, traditional, contextual

Empirical, scientific, theoretical
Knowledge Acquisition in Native Communities

- Based on oral tradition and history

- Indigenous Ways of Knowing
  - Practical use of information

- The interconnectedness of all things
  - Keen observation of environment
  - Observation of individual and communal experience
  - Multiple perspectives and participation over time
Native “research” Included

- Tribal elders
- Bundle holders
- Pipe carriers
- Spiritual leaders
- Lodge makers
- Ceremonial chiefs
- Storytellers

- Oral historians
- Rites of passage
- Artisans and craft-workers
- Extended family systems
- Practitioners of tradition and custom
A Clash of Cultures

Europeans and Anglo-Americans often assumed Indians:

- were uncivilized pagans, heathen, and even savages.
- were a homogenous people.
- could be "civilized" using the same program for all.
Colonization History

Between 389 and 650 Indian/US treaties from 1778 to 1871

Federal policy eras:
- colonization, removal, containment, allotment, reorganization, termination/relocation, self-determination, and self-governance.
Historical Experience of Native People and Research

- Scientific interests during the 19th Century
- The ongoing experiment
- Solving problems for Indians
- The accepted model for conducting research
Native Americans as Subjects of Research

- Grave robbing
  - Estimates between 100,000 and 2 million deceased American Indians have been “dug up” for storage or display by government agencies, museums, universities, and tourist attractions.
  - Dr. Samuel Morton, the father of American physical anthropology, collected large numbers of Indian crania in the 1840’s to prove Indians were racially inferior and doomed to extinction.
Legislation affecting cultural preservation

Antiquities Act of 1906 (16 **USC** 431-433) protecting prehistoric Indian ruins and artifacts, sites and buildings seen as important to US identity and history

National Historic Preservation Act (Public Law 89-665; 16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*) of October 1966

- to preserve historical and *archaeological* sites in the US.
NHPA requires federal agencies to evaluate the impact of federally funded or permitted projects through a process known as Section 106 Review.
More Legislation

• National Environmental Policy Act 1969
• Moss-Bennett Act of 1974 (amendment of Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960)
• American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (PL 95-341)
• Archaeological Resource and Protection Act 1979 (PL 96-95)
NAGRPA

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990

- object and sites should be documented if knowledge is to be preserved for future generations
A typical scenario: A researcher trained in the western approach

- enters/penetrates into a community
- observes and gathers data by “taking” notes, taking quotes, taking pictures, taking recordings, and taking samples
- leaves or essentially vanishes as quickly as he arrived
- completes analysis outside of the community, usually without community feedback or cross-validation amongst “subjects”
- shares findings of the study with the rest of the world, and
- receives recognition as “the authority” from the academic and non-Indian community or obtains grant funding.
The Net Effect of Historical Research on Native People

- Misappropriation and/or misrepresentation of culture and specific conditions in a community
- Inconclusive, and sometimes erroneous, assumptions about a people and their way of life
- Individuals and their communities are disenfranchised, even powerless, or exploited, whether intentional or not
- Communities can become marginalized and stereotyped
- Reality is distorted
JFK's American Indian Proclamation of 1963

“For a subject worked and re-worked so often in novels, motion pictures, and the media, American Indians are the least understood and most misunderstood of all citizens of the U.S.”
Cultural Property Rights

Cultural property rights is a concept that a society, especially that of indigenous peoples, has the authority to control the use of traditional heritage.
Cultural Property Rights

- These are rights held by a community rather than an individual.
- The property to be protected has been handed down from one generation to the next.
Examples of cultural property

- Names
- Traditional medicines
- Ceremonial healing practices
- Songs
- Histories
- Symbols
- Artifacts

- Designs
- Arts
- Languages
- Sacred sites
- Knowledge
- Ceremonies
- Customs
- Stories
Some Caveats for Conducting Research in Native Communities

Most researchers are considered “outsiders”

The Indian “world” is much different than the mainstream

There are stigmas associated with researchers and research

Building and maintaining trust

Integrity and Honesty
Caveats, continued

- Paternalism will not be tolerated
- Inclusion and involvement of “the people”
- Ownership of process and product
- Follow through (do what you say you’re going to do)
- Culturally appropriate, culturally-competent, culturally-sensitive, and tribally-specific
- Accountability and transparency
Research in Indian communities

There are advantages as well as disadvantages in working with one's own culture. The knowledge that you already have can form a basis for defining a more in-depth problem or topic to document; whereas, an outsider may need to take years to become familiar enough with the culture to define a meaningful topic. (Guyette, 1983, p. 126)
Some Recommendations
Research consideration

"Many tribes require approval of a research plan before the researcher is allowed within a community. Those who assist in a research project are often called 'participants' or 'consultants,' and may help formulate the research design" (p. xiv)
The Role of TCU's

- Train student researchers to address community issues and challenges
- Include a protocol to create a balance of community interest in the research process
- Make a deliberate attempt to incorporate key people from the community
Learning from One Another

- Form an Institutional/Tribal Review Board
- Seek a tribal resolution for each research project, if necessary (be familiar with the process)
- Ensure that any research is inclusive instead of exclusive
- Don’t just take...give
- Invite outside researchers and provide cultural awareness and sensitivity training to them regularly
New View for Tribes

- Tool for Self-Determination
- Issues for research in Indian Country
  - How will results be used?
  - Will you see the results?
  - What is the purpose of the research?
Some final thoughts

- Protecting cultural property through policy declarations is a worthy exercise of Native sovereignty (Harjo, 2002)

- Ideally, research about Indian people should be completed by Indian people for Indian people.

- Otherwise, follow protocols, use ethical and rigorous practices, and partner with responsible, trusted individuals and entities.
Use 3 P’s

Pragmatism
  • Avoid paternalism

Protocols
  • Importance of verbal and non-verbal behavior, following customs, open-mindedness

Practice
  • Be visible, be aware, ask for help
Cultural Competence

A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Cultural Humility

“Acknowledgement of one’s own barriers to true intercultural understanding. It is the difference between intellectually knowing another culture and being able to truly relate to it”.