

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Collaborating at the Trowel's Edge: Teaching and Learning in Indigenous Archaeology. Edited by Stephen W. Silliman.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6gf4b1mf>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 33(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Teeter, Wendy G.

Publication Date

2009-06-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Collaborating at the Trowel's Edge: Teaching and Learning in Indigenous Archaeology. Edited by Stephen W. Silliman. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008. 305 pages. \$65.00 cloth; \$35.00 paper.

In 2000 Joe Watkins wrote *Indigenous Archaeology: American Indian Values and Scientific Practices*. It was revolutionary at the time as it not only took stock of where archaeology was in a postrepatriation legislation era, especially with regard to its relationships with descendant communities, but also dared to envision a new world of collaboration and partnership between the two.

Stephen Silliman's edited volume, *Collaborating at the Trowel's Edge*, is the follow-up to Watkins's book, providing examples of what indigenous archaeology looks like in practice and suggesting future directions. It provides a guide for how to alter curriculum and field schools to respond to indigenous needs and viewpoints better. Each chapter looks at how indigenous-informed pedagogy within field schools or cultural resource management (CRM) training programs has the potential to expand and invigorate the discipline for separate and mutual benefit (11, 248). It is a must-read for anyone working with indigenous cultural resources.

A variety of definitions and meanings exists for indigenous archaeology, but at its most fundamental it is about collaboration for, with, and by indigenous people (3, 132, 213). From research design setting and methodological approaches to the data interpretation and incorporation of oral histories and cultural knowledge within reports, Native people want rigorous, high-quality research that reflects an integrating collaborative process (3, 51, 132).

Several authors point out that often archaeologists hide behind the consultation process perhaps to appear more "disinterested" or apolitical in the outcome (6, 67, 165). However, archaeology is well rooted in contemporary social and political issues involving personal and cultural interactions (34). Silliman and Dring point out that "archaeological field methods are not just research practices, but also social practices with social consequences" that archaeologists cannot avoid (79).

Nicholas unfortunately has to point out that the control over consultation times, conditions, and subjects is still primarily unilateral and reflects the legacy of scientific colonialism (243). Archaeology is a damaging enterprise, embedded in a Western construct that continues to appropriate and take away from descendant communities (6, 76). Indigenous archaeology as discussed within this book provides a guide to get out of this quagmire.

Zimmerman reminds the reader that although Native people created their own past and do not need archaeologists to tell them what it is, archaeology can still be useful as a tool that Native people can shape and use to answer their own questions (ix).

Each chapter touches on "(1) positive and future directions; (2) process, not just product; (3) diversity and flexibility; (4) longevity and sustainability; and (5) pedagogy" within an indigenous archaeology framework. Overall, the book focuses on new directions instead of the history of a troubled relationship, although the authors are quick to point out that the past is not and should not ever be forgotten (5–6).

The book is divided into three parts that explore field schools, education, and reflection. The first section looks at different field schools on tribal lands or with tribal collaboration. Field schools can be a middle ground where different ways of knowing the past and understanding the world need to be negotiated often in the quest to protect cultural places. During this process the dialogue created helps to decolonize archaeology and broaden the scope for a more satisfying process for everyone involved (247).

Collaborative and successful field schools have trained tribal members and non-Native students, although not always for a career involving cultural resources. Several chapters effectively present models and offer a guide for future possibilities. Jordan Kerber conducted summer workshops for Oneida Nation youth from 1995 to 2003 and found that the field schools not only strengthen relationships between Colgate University and the Oneida Nation but also helped to break down stereotypes about each other. It provided opportunities for Oneida people to learn about archaeology, to discover their ancestors, and to assist in the identification and protection of regional sites (89–90).

Field schools may also highlight little-known histories. Rossen demonstrates the political and social activism that archaeology can have through his field schools in the non-federally recognized Cayuga territory. He writes, “an ongoing professional presence forced residents to ponder and reflect on that history” (113). Silliman and Dring as well as Rossen discuss how the research they have undertaken through collaborative field schools became interwoven with the struggles for federal acknowledgment for the Eastern Pequot and Cayuga. They stress the importance for archaeologists to understand the “inherent sovereignty rights of tribes, especially as they relate to their land, natural and cultural resources, and relationships with other sovereign nations” (75).

The second part of *Collaborating at the Trowel's Edge* takes a step back to look at how indigenous archaeology intersects with primary and secondary education. Sonya Atalay connects decolonizing theories and critiques with specific course topics and a research methodology that will improve public education and professional training (124). She offers suggestions on must-reads by Vine Deloria Jr., Gregory Cajete, and Paolo Freire among many others to guide the reader in understanding participatory research and the importance of decolonizing methodologies. Atalay then provides a few courses that she has taught as well as other topics to consider including in classroom instruction. She writes, “When archaeology involves researching someone else’s heritage, I believe it must be collaborative or nothing at all” (113).

Andrea Hunter adds to the discussion by reviewing the state of curriculum devoted to CRM issues and, more specifically, what it is like to work with Native communities. The article is important as it provides an overview of CRM-focused programs within academia. Although the number of programs and courses continues to rise, there are still too few opportunities for students to be prepared practically for the work that 80 percent of them will undertake for some period of time as archaeologists (172). One might be even more dismayed by the scant inclusion of information about

working in tribal communities; however, Hunter focuses on how Northern Arizona University (NAU) has created an indigenous CRM emphasis within its applied indigenous studies program. In addition, she provides a few testimonials about why such programs are important to the discipline. This program's value is extended in the chapter presented by Davina Two Bears. She discusses the Navajo Nation Archaeology Department (NNAD) student training program in collaboration with NAU. The program formed because the Navajo Nation wants leaders in the field of anthropology and archaeology, not just technicians (195). Students in the NNAD-NAU program receive a rigorous curricular foundation but are also employed part-time by NNAD. This gives them on-the-job training and the challenge of applying what they have learned. The program is quite successful as shown by its high matriculation rate and the jobs that graduates obtain (196).

The final section provides a reflection on where indigenous archaeology has gone. The first review is by Kent Lightfoot, who has worked for many years at Fort Ross, California, collaborating with the Kashaya Pomo tribe. He points out how important collaborative archaeology is because of its strength in diversity (213). Approaching archaeology with different cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and worldviews can force archaeologists to consider multiple scenarios and carefully scrutinize their own ideas. Lightfoot also sees this as a way to counter claims that such archaeological endeavors are only political and not scientific (213). He warns that solely run tribal endeavors may lack the rigors that collaborative processes afford. Although his warning is respected, my experience has been the other way around. As soon as Native oral history, traditions, or concerns are raised, I have witnessed immediate archaeological defensive posturing or even outright dismissal of the information shared. There is still much to be learned.

Lightfoot sees a collaborative archaeology as a way to move the discipline away from false dichotomies such as the divisions between prehistoric and historic archaeology in North America. He and George Nicholas express a hope that archaeologists will better root themselves in a place and people in order to stay invested in the relationships and obligations they create (214, 241). Lightfoot feels that the best collaborations are ones that have protocols and expectations explicitly written before any work begins. The goal is not to create a codified document but to start clearly and let the relationship evolve and grow with fewer misunderstandings (216). Nicholas echoes these sentiments with a final reminder that ethnographers are prepared for cross-cultural encounters with people having different languages and customs while archaeologists are not (241).

Collaborating at the Trowel's Edge is a positive, inspirational book about how things have been and can be. Silliman hopes that indigenous archaeology will not be viewed as a splinter of archaeology, but one day will just be the way archaeology is conducted. If we each approach our research endeavors in such a collaborative way then it will.

Wendy G. Teeter

Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles