

# **Putting the Pen in Their Hands: Using Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives to Re-Map Global Education and Strengthen International Service Learning**

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*There is an uproar about indigenous knowledge in academia. Wisdom heretofore denied outsiders now speaks to the urgency of our time. What is academia's response to students who reach out in earnest? Colonialism in Latin America began before the Third Council of Lima (1582-3). To cease being colonial is to liberate ourselves, and our students. To enhance the higher education experience of students as future global leaders of a sustainable world, we must de-colonize our own thinking, enter the dialectic with indigenous communities, and together continue to transform higher education.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Universities in the global north increasingly send students on International Service Learning (ISL) programs designed to contribute to communities abroad and facilitate student learning (Baker-Boosamra 2006). ISL literature urges programs be co-created by communities and academia to advance the common good, but in practice, community partners are often afterthoughts (d'Arlach, Sanchez and Feuer 2009). Marginalizing community partners in ISL is especially problematic when working with Indigenous Peoples, who embrace their ethnic and cultural ties to pre-colonial societies, and who have been marginalized for centuries throughout the global south (United Nations 2009). We find many ISL programs unwittingly perpetuate the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and exhibit paternalistic

attitudes during community engagement (Frost-Arnold 2015). These patterns reinforce structures of inequality, rather than develop social-change agents, and privilege universities over the communities they supposedly serve (Bortolin 2011). As Chapman (2016) noted, ISL research must examine how global education governance and practices can enhance social justice, not perpetuate inequalities. Indeed, the very name Service Learning may be evolving toward the more equitable Civic Engagement.

## IDENTIFYING KEY INDICATORS

In 1979, Robert Sigmon's article "Service-learning: Three Principles" laid out guidelines for cultivating "good" service learning relationships which are still reflected in current ISL writing (Stanton, Giles and Cruz 1999). His principles are 1) those being served have control, 2) those served become better able to serve themselves, and 3) those serving are learners who shape their own outcomes (Sigmon 1979). Nearly 40 years later, we find only the third principle pertaining mostly to western academia is applied consistently in ISL programs. While many studies (Tonkin and Quiroga 2004; Kiely 2006; Sandman, Kiely, and Grenier 2009; Crabtree 2013) focus on ISL's effect on faculty and students, partners and beneficiaries of ISL programs are often mentioned fleetingly, if at all. Community partners are rarely consulted on project goals (Baker-Boosamra 2006) and receive little focus during impact assessment (Dorado and Giles 2004). When research does incorporate marginalized communities, researchers often simply extract data and learning to publish results in academic journals; depriving communities the right to manage information about their own lives (Jordan, Gust, and Scheman 2005). This pattern of extraction and marginalization is so pervasive that long-time international educator Nadinne Cruz left the field entirely rather than perpetuate the cycle. (Bargerstock and Bloomgarden 2016).

## RESEARCH

We must challenge existing paradigms and use increased south/north collaborations as a space for Indigenous Peoples to contribute to their own sustainable development programming, hearing their voices, and facilitating their active involvement (Crabtree 2013). In order to translate Sigmon's theoretical principles into action, this study advances knowledge and strategies about the role of Indigenous Peoples in ISL and discusses ways to design and implement ISL programs towards more respectful, integrated learning opportunities by exploring the following question: *What effect does the inclusion of community voices in the design, implementation and assessment of ISL have on the development, facilitation, and impact of these programs?* Raising many implication questions to be addressed, including:

- How can we include Indigenous Peoples voices/ideas/needs in every aspect of programs/research from design to execution, impact and assessment?
- How do/can ISL programs incorporate Sigmon's three principles?
- What prevents ISL programs from incorporating community involvement?
- How do we overcome these barriers?

This mixed-method research begins with a qualitative analysis of comparative literature on ISL, emphasizing Ibero-America theories and practices highlighting service done in partnerships/solidarity with community members (Batlle 2010; Tapia 2010; Aramburuzabala 2013). Additionally, quantitative data will be incorporated from the evaluation of ten years of action research and reciprocal ISL programs the authors have conducted in conjunction with communities in Peru. Finally, this research will conduct a case study of an ISL program being co-designed by an American university and a Peruvian community-development organization.

## PRACTICAL LEARNING TOOLS

In addition to a paper, the authors will produce best practices and implementation guidelines for universities on including Indigenous Peoples voices in program development. This will be based on community members telling their own stories for an equitable and reflective exchange with students as advocated by Fisher's (1985) narrative paradigm. It is imperative that we move from words to action and choose proper participatory methodologies dignifying host communities, allowing them to identify the objectives, indicators and timelines for engagement. Including Indigenous knowledge leads to mutual understanding and benefit by promoting students and faculty as scholar-practitioners who participate in the lives of local partners, meaningfully contribute to development initiatives, and highlight how people of all backgrounds can exchange narratives, and practice true "reciprocal learning" (Sigmon 1979).

## CONCLUSION

Diverse voices lead to collaboration that is more authentic, speaks to alternative narratives, challenges our ideas, and makes us think about new solutions. This study advances theory and practice, aiding scholar-practitioners to find solutions to problems of inequality and marginalization in ISL and highlights how diverse groups can strengthen each other's' work across the entire cycle of ISL programs.

Dedicated to Pachamama, Inca Mother Earth, goddess of fertility, provider of life nourishment and partner of Sun, Pachacamac. She is the path upon which we walk, foundation upon which we build our home, and provides the resting place for our dead.

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