

**Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought**

by Sandy Grande. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004. 192 pp. ISBN 0-7425-1828-0

*Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* calls attention to the vital need to center Native educational issues in critical theoretical discourse. For these reasons, Sandy Grande's (2004) text represents a "must read" for all critical scholars, as it interjects indigenous discourses that are missing from most critical educational work such as critical pedagogy and critical race theory. There are limitations to Grande's work as well, and I address them in this review not to dismiss the relevance of her work, but to buttress it with important critiques and to begin a debate in which native and critical scholars can come to a respectful acceptance of our different positions.

Grande's goal in *Red Pedagogy* is to define the "the common ground between American Indian intellectuals and other critical scholars engaged in anti-imperialist and anticapitalist struggles" (p. 6). In the first chapter Grande provides a thorough documentation of the history of American Indian education in the United States, and in the second chapter offers a "review of the history of democracy and the ways in which it has been imposed upon American Indians" in the United States (p. 7). She follows these introductory chapters with a critical examination of how democracy needs to be re-envisioned from an indigenous perspective. She also critically examines the ways in which external pressures of colonialism impact American Indian identity and gender issues. Finally, Grande proposes her concept of red pedagogy, which "emerges from a collectivity of critique and solidarity between and among indigenous peoples, other marginalized groups, and peoples of conscience" (p. 8).

Grande asserts that critical theorists, and in particular critical pedagogues, have overlooked the realities faced by American Indian communities in the United States, and thus have not sufficiently theorized about the unique relationship between American Indians and the United States. According to Grande, this failure has severely limited critical theorists' "ability to produce political strategies and educational interventions that account for the rights and needs of American Indian students" (p. 1). Similarly, American Indian scholars have failed to engage with critical pedagogy. Grande asserts that American Indian scholars instead choose to concentrate their work on the "production of historical monographs, ethnographic studies, tribally centered curriculums, and site-based research" (p. 1). Because both American Indian scholars and Western critical theorists fail to connect with each other's theories and methods, "matters of American Indian education" remain on the "margins of educational discourse" (Grande, 2004, p. 1).

Grande argues that American Indians must enter into a discourse with

critical theorists because indigenous communities are under siege from the forces of global capitalism and because of the increasing diversity of people who identify themselves as Native American. Grande critiques American Indian scholars' insularism and the "declaration by American Indian scholars that they need nothing outside themselves to understand their world or their place in it" (pp. 2-3). She thus intends to "initiate an indigenous conversation that can...engage in dialogical contestation with critical and revolutionary theories" (p. 3). Grande also argues that proponents of revolutionary critical theories many times fail to see their own "enmeshment with the Western paradigm... [but that] such aporias of revolutionary critical pedagogy, however must not be viewed as deficiencies. Rather they should be theorized as points of contention, helping to define the spaces in-between the Western and indigenous thought worlds" (p. 165-166).

Grande challenges both Western Critical theorists and American Indians to question the presuppositions they bring in their scholarship. As she states:

To begin, the predominantly white, middle-class advocates of critical theory will need to examine how their language and epistemic frames act as homogenizing agents when interfaced with the conceptual and analytical categories persistent within American Indian educational theory and praxis. They will especially need to examine the degree to which critical pedagogies retain the deep structures of Western thought (p. 3).

Grande also challenges American Indian scholars to "challenge their own propensity to privilege local knowledge and personal experience over the macroframes of social and political theory" (p. 3). However, while Grande's work identifies necessary points of collaboration, it overlooks the distinctiveness of indigenous knowledge systems that are fully equipped with philosophies and approaches to the world. And while Grande points out the limitations of Western theoretical discourses, both her critique of American Indian scholars and her articulation of red pedagogy ultimately utilize Western theoretical constructs and assumptions.

The manner in which indigenous scholars theorize must be centered in tribally specific knowledge systems that are geographically demarcated and derived. For tribal peoples epistemologies represent constantly emerging knowledge systems that are specific to the tribal origins of a people and are primary and inherent in locating a tribe's sovereignty (Benham & Stein, 2003; Cajete, 1994; Champagne, 1995; Cook-Lynn, 2001; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Smith, 2002; Tippeconnic, 2001; Wilkens, 2002). While Grande highlights indigenous realities and brings issues that are relevant to indigenous peoples to the forefront of her initial discussion, her work does not incorporate the distinctiveness and centeredness of Indian knowledge systems.

To illustrate, Grande's indigenous theory of subjectivity presented in Chapter Four is both "geographically rooted and historically placed" and "is committed to providing American Indian students the social and intellectual space to re-imagine what it means to be Indian in contemporary U.S. society, arming them with a critical analysis of the intersecting systems of domination and the tools to navigate them" (pp. 116, 118). Similarly, the author asserts that the "frameworks of a revolutionary critical theory provide indigenous educators and scholars a way to think about the issues of sovereignty and self-determination that moves beyond simple cultural constructions and analysis" (p. 165). However, tribal knowledge systems do provide American Indian students with information about what it means to be Indian in the United States. Grande's dismissal of the current treatment of the issues of sovereignty and self-determination by indigenous scholars and educators as grounded in "simple cultural constructions and analysis" is problematic and exposes the author's predisposition towards Western theories. What Grande overlooks is that these "simple cultural constructions" are in fact sophisticated, based on millennia of observation, and thus the best and primary foundations for tribal sovereignty.

Furthermore, Grande's notion of the fourth space of being and the related concept of *indígena* do not accurately capture the distinctiveness of tribal identity or ontology because they are derived from the margins of Western society. Grande argues that "comfortable modern identities" (p.171) must remain integral in the quest for sovereignty, and elaborates that "the proposed construct of *indígena* is intended to guide the search for a theory of subjectivity in a direction that embraces the location of Native peoples in the 'constitutive outside'" (p. 171). If framed from a tribal perspective, however, Native peoples are not located in the "constitutive outside" because they do not conceive of themselves in relation to the West. Sovereignities are ultimately derived and located in a tribe's specific cosmology and ontology.

The concept of *indígena* "claims a distinctively indigenous space shaped by and through a matrix of legacy, power and ceremony. In so doing, the fourth space of *indígena* stands outside the polarizing debates of essentialism and postmodernism, recognizing that both the timeless and temporal are essential for theorizing the complexity of indigenous realities" (171). Placing ceremony in the fourth space of *indígena* is a conceptual move in which the process of ceremony is stripped of its tribally specific life. Ceremonies for tribal people are rooted in specific geographies and cosmologies. By converting ceremony into a general construct, the author transforms it into a universal space in which tribally specific ceremonial meaning is subordinated.

Similarly, Grande's conceptualization of *indígena* is not framed from a tribal space, and instead relies on western methods of identity-making. As she writes:

Embodying indígena is about the choice to live differently, about standing in defiance of the vapid emptiness of the whitestream and about resisting the kind of education where connections to Earth and the spirit world are looked upon with skepticism and derision (p. 171).

While I agree with Grande's assertion that indigenous communities must and do resist educational practices that do not promote indigenous metaphysics and their accompanying sovereignties, indigenous peoples do not choose to "live differently." Grande locates the concept of indígena in the social margins: "...an assertion of the margin as more than a location defined by economic instability and political servitude. It is re-imagined as a transgressive fourth space of both transience and permanence" (p. 171). This positioning of indigenous identity in Grande's formulation of indígena runs counter to indigenous notions of identity, which are not defined in opposition to Western systems. By locating these concepts in "the margin," Grande places the indigenous space in contradistinction to the West. This runs counter to the centeredness and primary positioning of indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that are a result of their being grounded in specific geographies and cosmologies.

While this review is critical of Grande's work, it is not without purpose. As native peoples, we need to make it clear that our sovereignties are guided by our specific cultural knowledge. Texts such as Grande's are important in reminding us that there are movements with which we can collaborate in order to promote self-determination, but in these collaborations, we must be mindful that our stories, our understanding of ourselves and the world around us remain central.

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### **Author**

Dolores Calderón, J.D., is a PhD Candidate at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies with a specialization in race and ethnic studies. Her scholarly interests include American Indian education, border studies, critical race theory and legal studies.