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A Conceptual Framework for Non-Native Instructors who Teach Adult Native American Students at the University

Abstract: Native students often desire an education that will enable them to contribute to their home communities and facilitate tribal development, while retaining close ties to their cultural heritage and identity. We outline a conceptual framework that provides a starting point for non-Native American educators to consider as they engage Native American students in higher education. Four elements are critical for non-Native instructors to consider: his or her positionality; the history of educational delivery to Native populations – in particular the "Boarding School Era" – and its implications for education today; the presence of micro-aggressions felt by Native students on most college campuses; and how desires to increase and facilitate tribal sovereignty and self-determination may inform the education of Native students. By engaging in self-reflective pedagogy with positionality, history, and sovereignty in mind, non-Native instructors may be more likely to engage in effective strategies for Native learners.

Keywords: Native American, American Indians, higher education, adult education

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Introduction

Mainstream colleges and universities have struggled to accommodate Native American learners and to create an educational environment that promotes retention and graduation (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), in a context that acknowledges that Native learners have historically had difficulty in maintaining enrollment and graduating from colleges and

universities. This is so, for many reasons. Native American students, in comparison to all others, are the most disproportionately affected by poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to educational opportunities (Beaulieu, 2000 as cited in Grande, 2004). As a result, Native Americans are the least likely minority group to enroll in public 4-year institutions and the least likely to persist to graduation in those institutions (Pavel, 1999). The American Council on Education's (ACE) 2002 report found that Native students had the lowest college admission rates in the United States. Further, ACE reported, these students exhibit the highest drop-out rates, the lowest academic performance rates, and the lowest retention rates in the nation (Fann, 2004). Data from 2010 show Native American graduation rates were alarmingly low with Native Americans, who make up 1.1% of the United States population, earning only 0.7% of all associate's, bachelor's, and advanced degrees (US Department of Education, 2010).

While socio-economic status contributes to these troubling rates, we posit that other factors influence non-enrollment and non-retention. Universities are often assumed to be providers of opportunity, but Native Americans do not always think of the university in that manner. The university is filled with contradictions and conflicts for the Native American learner. Tierney (1992b) said, "In the case of American higher education we find that colleges and universities reflect the culture of the dominant society. In the United States, that dominant culture is White." Native epistemologies, or "ways of knowing," are often incongruent with that of institutional and/or mainstream "ways of knowing." These contradictions often lead these students to believe that their worldview, stemming from Native American culture, religion, and traditional teachings are wrong and unvalued, and thus have no place in the mainstream world of the university. This becomes a reason for early departure. In a context where knowledge is valued, epistemology, or our "way of knowing," becomes a contested space. Where there is contested space, issues of power are manifested; often the burden of this conflict is cast upon the Native American learner, who carries much less power in these interactions.

Brayboy (2006) rejects the idea of systematic assimilation in educational institutions for American Indian students, and notes that although some assimilation seems to be an inevitable outcome of the formal structures of western schooling, educators should not assume that assimilation is a goal of Native students. On the contrary, Native students should be able to combine Indigenous notions of culture, knowledge, and power with Western/European conceptions in order to actively engage in self-determination and tribal sovereignty (Brayboy, 2006). Ultimately, as Brayboy argues, "this analysis may lead to a re-conception of the parameters of engaging Indigenous students within

institutions" (2006, p. 434). Such a reconception must push beyond the boundaries of Critical Pedagogy. Grande (2004) explains:

> Critical pedagogy is born of a Western tradition that has many components in conflict with indigenous cosmology and epistemology, including a view of time and progress that is linear and anthropocentrism that puts humans at the center of the universe. Moreover, one of its key informants, Marxism, is prone to promulgating its own oppressive grand narratives by dismissing indigenous cultures as "primitive" or pre-capitalist entities. (p. 88)

We offer this paper and contend that teachers and researchers of Indian people need to become aware of and make use of Indigenous theories, models, and practices in seeking to serve and support the success of Native American students (Tippeconnic Fox, Lowe, & McClellan, 2005). Lakota philosopher and scholar, Vine Deloria, Jr. once said that the fundamental factor that keeps Indians and non-Indians from communicating is that they are speaking about two entirely different perceptions of the world (Deloria, 1979). As non-Natives, we often find ourselves embedded in mainstream academic/teaching cultures, histories, and contexts, which make it easy to slip into the familiar interpretations of familiar events. The use of theory provides an opportunity to jar one's thinking and suggest other ways of working (Brookfield, 2005).

It seems that non-Native educators in higher education need to think differently and look at other epistemological interests to frame their study and practice if they are truly interested in sustaining the educational interests of their Native students and reversing recent trends and statistics. The hope is that what we offer spurs a process of reflection about how teachers of Native students might critically think about their pedagogy and practice, which could ultimately better address the needs of tribal communities and work toward changes in the larger educational community that would benefit Native students and their home communities.

We argue that four considerations should be of paramount to these instructors, and that both student-centered and self-centered approaches must be used for effective pedagogy. Student-centered considerations for effective pedagogy include our contention that teachers need to understand these particular things about native students' experiences and expectations: the colonial history of boarding schools, the persistence of hate crimes and microaggression against American Indian students, and those students' unique educational goals relating to tribal self-determination and sovereignty. We also argue that instructors need to engage in some self-centered considerations, namely around issues of positionality, whereby instructors understand their own identities, in order to unpack white privilege, interrogate unstated – but held – assumptions, and acknowledge difference. Positionality works to enable reflexivity in instructor

attitude and practice, which will facilitate non-Native understandings of the issues that native students face, the goals they have, etc.

A conceptual framework: four critical elements for non-Native educators to consider

Though there are several confounding factors contributing to low rates of graduation and educational attainment in students from Native communities, the student/teacher relationship is one of the most basic interactions that take place at the university and one that often determines whether or not students will persist (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) estimate that nearly 90% of Native students are taught by non-Native teachers; the inevitable intersection of Native student and non-Native instructor is a crucial connection that needs continuous and critical examination. It is clear that non-Native faculty play a key role in the education (including retention and graduation) of Native students.

Brown and Robinson Kurpius (1997) suggested that non-Native staff and faculty must take leadership in shaping a campus environment that is welcoming, supportive, and affirming of students who are Native American. Given the fact that Native students still are not matriculating into the university at higher levels, we believe that educators must go beyond the necessary, but inadequate, welcoming, supportive, and affirming ideas that Brown and Robinson Kurpius (1997) advocated. In this paper, we suggest that educators who teach Native American students must be active in developing pedagogy that acknowledges and privileges Native knowledge, voices, and experiences, and facilitates an analysis of the social, political, and material realities of their tribal and home communities. We consider the four tenets that follow to be important starting points toward that end.

Positionality: CRiT walking on a red road

Feminist and critical race scholars stress the importance of embodied and self-reflective (Flores & Garcia, 2009), or reflexive (Pillow, 2003) understandings of difference in enacting pedagogy. Reflective praxis, focusing on who "I" am as an instructor and where "I" stand in relationship to my students, is the key to emancipation in education (Tisdell, 1998). These scholars stress the importance of self-reflective practice for understanding one's unique (and often privileged)

position within any given structure or setting. Tisdell highlights the absence of discussions of positionality in the literature on instruction for the adult learning population (p. 45), writing "Clearly the positionality of the instructor always affects what goes on in classes" (ibid). Tisdell acknowledges that her "whitneness informed what [she] initially saw as 'valid or relevant knowledge,'" and that her positionality and identity affected that she could "see" in her classroom (p. 40).

Kimberle Crenshaw first expressed the importance of positionality to legal studies, in a 1989 article, where she developed the key concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw argues that African American women can be understood to be traveling on two separate paths – the path of race (Black) and the path of gender (woman). Lived experience suggests that women of color may experience discrimination solely because of their gender, and solely because of their race – but that they are quite likely to experience discrimination based on the intersections of those identities. Only by understanding their identity and positionality can individuals fully articulate their experiences. Johnson and Bhatt (2003) argue that white instructors, and female instructors in particular, must become vulnerable in order to be effective allies to students of color; much of this vulnerability stems from an understanding of the intersectional positionality of instructors and students alike. The identities of learner and instructor are both important, as "the positionality of both the instructor and the students affects both how participants construct knowledge and come to voice" (Tisdell, 1998, p. 41).

Crenshaw's analysis most often leads to a traffic metaphor, with the vulnerability of instructor and students alike metaphorically akin to the vulnerability of being outside of a vehicle in the midst of a busy intersection. However, in their contribution to *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Hughes and Giles (2010) develop a mobile pedagogy based on this embodiment and understanding of positionality. They call this "CRiT walking" – and advocate that the method uses "historical data, personal accounts and observations, and social criticism of the surrounding landscape as [they] navigate toward new perspectives on established social and educational phenomena" (p. 41). By taking their researcher and teacher bodies on the (metaphorical) road, they encounter racism in its varied and interconnected forms of "social, political, economic, and power dynamics" and ask what those phenomena mean for education.

We advocate that educators interested in serving the needs of Native learners should not only CRiT walk, but that they should do so on a "Red Road," and while practicing self-reflection and self-monitoring to ensure a vibrant learning environment. To do so, it means to not only examine the White privilege held by most educators at the collegiate level (something explained eloquently in Robert Jenson's article (1998) on white privilege in the academy),

but also to examine that privilege in relationship to the particular population – in this case, Native students. To do so, it enacts our belief that our positionality as instructors is essential to understand, while acknowledging that Native students, just like women of color, often travel on intersecting paths.

As non-Native teachers and researchers, we are concerned about the educational opportunities afforded to *all* the people, and not just those students whom come from the mainstream, in this area, a place from which we both were born and raised, in the upper Great Plains of the U.S. Our conversations with educators in the region give us pause to consider the quality of education being offered to Native students, in particular, however – as it seems that pedagogical "best practices" may not travel well interculturally.

Implications of a history of boarding school

While it falls outsides the bounds of this essay to give a complete history of Indian education, we must note its importance. Understanding the assumptions and injustices that characterized non-Native education of Native American students (beginning with European contact and that included federal and missionary boarding, trade, and labor schools) is a critical place of engagement for educators. It is imperative that an educator is knowledgeable of the sociocultural and historical background of the various imposed forms of education that Native American students and their families endured in the name of colonization. An understanding of this history makes clear why notions of "education" as defined by non-Natives are problematic for Native Americans and have ramifications even for students today.

The historic accounts of contact between Indian Country and mainstream America holds many harsh memories for Native families (Connell-Szasz, 1999) as the clash of Western education systems and Native educational philosophy has been documented in a variety of ways. Grande (2004) and Connell-Szasz (1999) organize Indian education into three eras as defined by the prevailing power system: the period of missionary domination (contact through the mid-1880s), the period of federal domination (mid-1880s through the mid-1900s), and the era of self-determination (1960s forward).

From the initial moments of colonialism, Euro-American policy makers sought to use the schoolhouse – specifically the boarding, missionary, and labor schools – as an instrument for annihilating and acculturating many Native American youth to "American" ways of thinking and living (Adams as cited in Pewewardy, 2003). The federal government took, often forcibly, young Native children miles away from their homes and placed them in boarding

schools far removed from reservation life in order to prevent them from running away and to keep them away from the influences of their family and the tribe. These highly important years of youth formation were marred with strict discipline that prohibited Native students from speaking their Native language, practicing their religion, and having contact with their families. Essentially, teachers and schools took their culture from them.

In these schools Native American students moved in an alien world that taught them to deny any merits of the education long transmitted by their people (Connell-Szasz, 1999). Through its ethnocentric lens, governmental educational policy asserted that mainstream culture and the means by which that culture was transmitted should be adopted by all who lived in the United States (Connell-Szasz, 1999). Such imperialist purposes were reflected in curriculum that included teaching allegiance to the U.S. government, exterminating the use of Native languages, and destroying Indian customs, particularly religion (Spring as cited in Grande, 2004). This concept of de-culturalization combined education for democracy and political equality with cultural genocide – the attempt to destroy cultures (Pewewardy, 2003).

Grande (2004, p. 12) observes, "Perhaps at no other time in U.S. history did the church and state work so hand in hand to advance the common project of White supremacy as it did during the period of missionary domination." During this era, missionary groups acted as the primary developers and administrators of schools while the federal government served as the not-so-silent partner, providing economic and political capital through governmental polices (Grande, 2004).

The history of Indian education, as it is widely written, tends to be a chronology of federal policies experimenting with reinventing Native American people in the likeness of White people (Begaye, 2004). "Indian education" or a colonized form of education has been practiced by educators for the past century in federally operated school under the false assumption that the goal of "education" is to mold all students to become a part of the mainstream (Grande, 2004). Grande continues with this important analysis, "Indian education was never simply about the desire to 'civilize' or even de-culturalize a people, but rather, from its very inception, it was a project designed to colonize Indian minds as a means of gaining access to Indian labor, land, and resources" (2004, p. 19).

There have been powerful critics of this "civilizing project." The 1928 release of The Merriam Report harshly criticized not only the existing educational policies of removing Native American children from their homes and communities, but criticized the institutional practices of forced manual labor and severe discipline (Grande, 2004). The political liberalism of the 1960s spawned the legislation of the 1970s that provided Natives with the potential to become

self-determining in their schooling, health, and economic status (Connell-Szasz, 1999). American Indian leadership was crucial for passage of measures such as the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Connell-Szasz, 1999), which led to the contemporary era of Indian education.

This history shows us why educators need to understand why the term "education" is itself problematic for many Native American students before any educational endeavor begins. Colonialist motives on the part of white educators, politicians, and religious leaders from days gone past have problematized education for Native Americans. The history of education from many Native perspectives is so deeply embedded in colonization that it has been regarded as a tool of colonization and not as a potential tool for self-determination and development (Smith, 2005). Thus before educators teach Native Americans students, a thoughtful consideration of various implications of past attempts should be examined.

Implications of hate crime and microaggression

Even for those students coming from backgrounds not implicated by the history of boarding schools, or for those for whom that experience was not as detrimental, considerable evidence shows that adult Native learners on college and university campuses are subjected to high level of hate crime, bias-motivated stereotyping, and microaggression. In her groundbreaking 2008 work on those topics, Barbara Perry paid special attention to how these negative experiences, accumulated over a lifetime, impacted Native learners at the collegiate level. Perry (2009) argues, and her ethnographic and interview data provide ready substantiation that hate crime and "daily experience[s] of ethnoviolence" against American Indians are grossly underreported. She writes that, though the federal government's Uniform Crime Report "typically reports in the area of fifty hate crimes perpetrated against Native Americans annually," but "... on any given day, if I were to ask the Native American – mostly Navajo – students in my classes ... the eight to twelve such students in each class could easily catalogue that many among them" (p. 1). What might be worse, she elaborates, is that the 50 or so crimes reported each year are the outliers – the incidents that reached such levels of violence to warrant reporting. Most Indians live daily with smaller slights, microaggression, and stereotyping. Sue et al. (2007) have taxonomized three forms of microaggression likely to be suffered by students of color: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation (cited in Panter, Daye, Allen, Wightman, & Deo, 2008, p. 68). Through these acts, individuals are told

they are worthless; and, as Perry (2009) puts it, drawing from the literature on domestic violence, "the cumulative effect of being told again and again that one is worthless or subhuman, which is perfectly legal" (and, we might note, not reported) "may be even more disempowering than being physically assaulted on one or two occasions" (p. 10). Hate crime, then, encapsulates a range of behaviors – from clearly illegal assault, to clearly legal verbal abuse.

Perry's (2009) research, a 5-year study involving more than 275 interviews with native college students in two regions (the desert Southwest and the Great Plains), showed plainly that Native students are subjected to persistent stereotyping, verbal abuse, threat of violence, and physical assault, based on their racial/ethnic identity (p. 83). Through her work, we can see how dominant, "common sense" (Author, 2006; Lopez, 2000 [1994]) understandings of native culture and peoples continue to paint them as "simple" or "primitive" (Perry, 2009, p. 43), and Indians themselves as "stupid, lazy, sponging [off of society], [and] inferior" (ibid., 53). These perceptions are manifested in overt violence and racist language; the stories Perry documents are chilling. The persistence of hate crime against Native students is especially important to understand, for its impact on educational attainment because hate crime is, itself, a cultural process of education: with it, the dominant group educates the marginal group as to the dramatic extent of their marginal status, and "simultaneously recreates the hegemony of the perpetrator's group and the subordination of the victim's group" (ibid., 11).

As Perry (2009) puts it, "the toll that anti-Indian activity takes is … cumulative in its effects …. Each discrete incident is lived as part of an historical pattern of victimization. Cumulatively, they can have the intended effect of overwhelming their targets" (p. 101). The result of such constant victimization is predictable. Sometimes, the result is the violent enactment of rebellion against perpetrators (pp. 110–112); more likely, though, the result of constant fear and stereotyping is for victims to "turn the violence inward" and engage in "internalized racism" (p. 113). As Fanon (1963) and Freire (1970) have both noted, the shame and self-contempt experienced by victims of hate crime often manifests in internalized racism, internalized oppression, and internalized colonialism.

Victims of microaggression and hate crime feel disempowered; they often want to give up, to withdraw, and to isolate. Many, indeed, do. Perry (2009) states, "A substantial number [of native learners] fail to return even after the first year of study" (p. 411). Perry continues, "this is, of course, the goal of hate crime perpetrators: to force their victims to give up, to return to the reservation … this is an all-too-common response on the part of actual and vicarious victims" of hate crime and microaggression (p. 103). In their study of the experiences of "everyday discrimination" felt by incoming law students of color, Panter et al.

(2008) found persuasive evidence that not only are students of color confronted with discrimination, daily, such experiences are likely to have negative physical health, emotional health, and educational impact. Hernandez, Carranza, and Almeida's study of the adaptive responses of mental health professionals of color to microaggression, when unhealthy, included similar withdrawal, hopelessness, and self-isolation (healthy/adaptive responses were legion, and heartening) (Hernandez et al., 2010). We argue that low retention and graduation rates for Native students are connected to the colonial history of education in boarding schools, and the continuing colonization through hate crimes experienced by Native learners in university settings.

Non-Native instructors have an important role to play in mitigating these impacts. An interesting thing about microaggression is that the negative impacts of singular and cumulative acts are there, whether or not the insult, put-down, or invalidation was intended. So, simply being intentional not to offend is not enough. As Perry writes, "the imposition of white Western perceptions of Native Americans' worth begins at a very young age. It is a relentless process that is orchestrated through the media, school curricula, and the harassment and name-calling by powerful Others such as non-Native teachers and peers" (2009, p. 117). We argue here that non-Native Others (college teachers, here) have more than a duty to refuse to engage in harassment, name-calling, and stereotyping. Negative perceptions of natives are present throughout the institution, and are particularly manifest in curricula that treat "History" as White/Western/Greek (p. 43), and certain tribal histories as "culture" or "tribal." The attention to instructor positionality, historical context, and student lived experiences and expectations that we advocate requires that, in order to be effective teachers, we interrupt and interrogate those stereotypes and norms whenever they are found in their classroom, course materials, and curricular design.

Sovereignty, self-determination and decolonization

Non-Native teachers must understand that Native students have many educational needs that differ from those of mainstream society. Further, the assimilation objectives of American education are detrimental to the social, economic, and political well-being of their communities (Swisher, 1998, p. 191). Brayboy (2006) notes the importance that Native students place on returning, post-graduation, to be of service to their tribes and communities. He stresses that the students he encountered, those completing the University of Utah's American Indian Teacher Training Program, emphasized the "importance of making connections between different types and forms of knowledge in order

to meet larger, community goals of self-education and sovereignty" (p. 426). Three ideas of great importance to Native people and their tribal community's survival are sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization. Thus educators should have an understanding of how these ideas are relevant to the Native student's educational endeavor.

Sovereignty

Non-Native people often have difficulty in understanding the concept of Native sovereignty and how it fits with the concept of democracy within the U.S. context. The implications of the unique status of the dual-citizenship of Native students' needs to be better understood by educators in large part because in contemporary U.S.–tribal relations, sovereignty is of tremendous conceptual importance. Native learners are likely to see sovereignty as a primary goal of tribal government, and their role in tribal leadership and community building as an important part of the move toward increased independence and self-governance that many tribes are engaged in. The language of sovereignty is spoken frequently in tribal politics and culture.

Contemporary legal and cultural conceptions of sovereignty trace back to a series of Supreme Court decisions written in the 1830s, by Chief Justice John Marshall. These cases, known as the Marshall Trilogy, or, the *Cherokee Cases*, recognized the inherent sovereignty of American Indian tribes under international law, and as governed by the constitution (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia; Worcester v. Georgia*). Such sovereignty contains rights of self-government and self-determination, boundary and membership policing, and other powers associated with nation states in international law at the time (Norgren, 2004). However, Marshall's decisions also held that, as conquered peoples subject to United States law, "sovereign tribes" were actually "semi-sovereign" "dependent domestic nations," for whom the United States federal government held a trust responsibility. Deloria and Lytle (1984) later termed this tribal status as being a "nation within a nation." This legal framework of nations within has, for the past 140 years, evolved to state that the United States and tribal nations are in government-to-government relationships with each other, with tribal governments having limited but potentially powerful rights of self-government, and with the federal government having supremacy (over territorial and state governments) in Indian affairs (see particularly: Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001; Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2007).

Castagno and Brayboy (2008) said that although tribal communities have a strong sense of the connections between education and sovereignty, these

connections are rarely recognized among mainstream educators or educational policy-makers. Three things become important for educators to understand about this legal construction, continuing on to contemporary American Indian–U.S. affairs.

First, with the exception of particular legislative acts in the 1900s (most importantly, the Major Crimes Act of 1885 and the American Indian Gaming Regulatory Act [IGRA] 1988), states are constitutionally barred from asserting jurisdiction over tribal affairs, or entering into treaties or compacts with the tribes. The federal government holds primary responsibility for tribal–government relations, for making treaties (until 1871) and enacting legislation. Second, the Congress and Court have held, at various times throughout history, but especially since during the Nixon, Clinton, and Obama presidencies, that tribal self-determination should be a paramount goal of U.S. policymaking regarding Native American tribes. Third, tribes have retained, and in many cases reclaimed, their ability to exercise rights of sovereignty such as determining membership, policing borders, and avoiding federal and state taxation and regulation on legitimate.

While sovereignty is conceptually important, it is widely acknowledged that full sovereignty will never be reclaimed; further, it is acknowledged as a principle in international law that nations (such as the United States), while sovereign, are also interdependent and interconnected in the global economy and within global governance schemes. As Wilkins said:

> A sovereign nation is a distinct political entity which exercises a measure of jurisdictional power over a specific territory. It is not an absolute or fully independent power in pure sense because no nation or tribe in the world today, regardless of its geographic girth, population base or gross national product, is completely or fully sovereign. (2007, p. 51)

Clearly, the idea of full independence articulated with the term "sovereignty" is likely neither possible, nor advisable. Rather, tribal members seek increased powers of self-governance; in this vein, tribal-run schools, senior-assisted living programs, fire departments, police forces cultural enters, and recreational/community centers become important markers of success. Again, Wilkins (2007) offers a clear and compelling definition:

> Tribal sovereignty is the intangible and dynamic cultural force inherent in a given indigenous community, empowering that body toward the sustaining and enhancement of political, economic, and cultural integrity. It undergirds the way tribal governments relate to their own citizens, to non-Indian residents, to local governments, to the state government, to the federal government, to the corporate world, and to the global community. (p. 51)

In a context that gives primacy to enacting sovereignty, tribal learners who go on to be teachers on the reservation – or community planners, or journalists, etc. – are not

only, then, "serving their community," they are self-consciously contributing to the growth of successful self-government.

Given this focus, practical knowledge and transferable skill building become increasingly important for Native learners (Brayboy, 2006). Brayboy (2006) summarized the role of academic knowledge that is acquired from educational institutions and contextualizes its relationship to tribal sovereignty:

> In many of our communities this is often referred to as "book knowing," or "book smarts." While Indigenous ways of knowing and book smarts are often seen as diametrically opposed, these different forms of knowledge do not necessarily need to be in conflict. Rather, they complement each other in powerful ways. This blending of academic and cultural knowledge creates understanding that is key to survival and tribal sovereignty. For example, knowledge learned in school can be used in conjunction with Tribal knowledge toward social justice for these communities. The strategic use of multiple forms of knowledge generates power that is situated, dynamic, and historically influenced. (p. 435)

Self-determination

These forms of knowledge are related to self-conscious, tribally-directed, and federally-supported practices of self-determination. Education – via individuals enrolling in college, university, and tribal colleges – is an important part of tribal self-determination (Perry, 2009, p. 411). Therefore, self-determination is another consideration of which educators need to be cognizant; such cognizance ultimately serves as a reminder that Indian education/research needs the voice of the Indian. The Self-determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 allowed for the possibility of Native nations to gain more control over the education that their children receive (Connell-Szasz, 1999). Inglebret and Pavel (2000) said that the journey must begin with Native peoples deciding the paths to be taken, the rivers to be crossed, and the mountains to be challenged as they strive to develop knowledge that promotes the well-being of their peoples. Native people believe that they have the answers for improving Indian education and they must have the opportunity to speak for themselves (Swisher, 1998).

Mihesuah and Wilson's book, *Indigenizing the Academy* (2004), calls for educators, scholars, and researchers to empower Native students in the face of the Native/Western way of knowing conflict by working to carve out spaces where Indigenous values and knowledge are respected, to create an environment that supports research and methodologies useful to Indigenous nation building, and to compel institutional responsiveness to Indigenous issues, concerns, and communities. This is a steep task as James (2004) says that the structure and procedures of higher education flow from, build on, and reinforce

values, norms, identities, and status systems of maintaining the mainstream majority. The academy has not typically valued Native knowledge, and Wilson (2004) confirmed by claiming that the university often dismisses any knowledge that challenges the status quo and Western ways of knowing and has only accepted knowledge that can be used for colonial purposes. An instructor who understands this may give Native students the flexibility in assignments to allow the student to focus on tribal issues or challenges.

For students, enhancing tribal sovereignty may become a process of helping their home communities to sustain their cultural integrity, according to their self-determined needs (Wilson, 2004) and is often a significant motivation for earning a university degree. When Native adult students leave the reservation to attend the university, there is a hope that the goals stemming from their culture and home will guide their education and prepare them to assist their tribal communities in their quests for social justice (Brayboy, 2006). These goals and their educational experiences are critical because these adult students will be the ones creating new responses to old issues surrounding their tribal communities (Brayboy, 2006). Self-determination involves seeking self-generated answers to questions articulated, not by the academy, but by the tribal community members themselves.

Decolonization

Self-determination contributes to the ongoing and critical processes of decolonization. Most non-Native educators struggle to understand the concept of decolonization, assuming it must mean wholesale rejection of contemporary structures of relationships between Native Americans and non-Natives – and most often a return of stolen and settled lands. Understanding decolonization is particularly difficult, when most educators from dominant society do not have a solid understanding of the historical and continuing practices of colonization felt by tribal communities and peoples. Colonization has occurred through force (wars, conflicts), politics (relocation and termination act), education (boarding school, missionary school, labor schools), and governance (language and dietary loss). With regards to colonization, Alfred (2004) poignantly wrote that it has caused Indigenous people to lose their freedom to exist as Indigenous peoples in almost every single sphere of their existence – the fundamental denial to be Indigenous in a meaningful way, and the unjust occupation of the physical, social, and political spaces they need to survive as Indigenous peoples.

Ultimately, Native students need university classrooms that create the conditions where the students not only celebrate their own histories but also are

helped to examine critically how their lives are shaped and molded by society's forces (Tierney, 1992b). Wilson (2004) said, "We need to sort out that which has been imposed on us, consciously and critically assess whether it supports or harms Indigenous value systems and worldviews, and make appropriate changes" (p. 79). This need not always be done in classrooms focusing on Native issues; rather, gaining critical thinking skills as part of collegiate education can be a step in aiding Native students in this regard. Classes from various disciplines, which focus on structural oppression, globalization, and identity formation in the United States and abroad can be understood to provide native students with the opportunity to practice skills in self-reflection, critical thinking, and positionality. Such practice will better equip those same students to engage in deeper understanding of colonization as an historical and ongoing process of imposition and resistance.

Adult Native learners, in particular, have a deep desire to be of service to the (re)building of their home communities. To that end, Grande (2008, p. 236) said, "Native students and educators deserve a pedagogy that cultivates a sense of collective agency as well as a praxis that targets the dismantling of colonialism, helping them navigate the excesses of dominant power and revitalization of indigenous communities." Native students would be served well by an educational experience that facilitates a critical consciousness regarding the causes of oppression, the distortion of historical events, and to what degree Native people have internalized colonist ideas and practices (Wilson, 2004).

Non-tribal educators who assume that assimilation is the goal of Native learners, or (worse) assume that assimilation should be the outcome of Indigenous education, regardless of the person's desire, would do well to rethink that tenet. Native students, often feel part of "two worlds" while they are at university. Brayboy suggested (2006) that education might also teach American Indian student show to combine Native American notions of culture, knowledge, and power with Western/European conceptions in order to actively engage in survivance, self-determination, and tribal autonomy. Critical thinking about colonization becomes a tool, or skill, useful in the process of decolonization through practices of self-determination, leading to a greater articulation of sovereignty.

Part of this critical thinking brings us back to the beginning of this article, where we focus on constructions of knowledge as a site where Native students may feel undervalued and unwelcome in an academic setting. Sovereignty itself relies upon both Native and Western epistemologies. Brayboy's examination of contemporary Native epistemologies shows that "indigenous conceptions" of sovereignty do not see power as "a property or trait than an individual has to exercise control over others." Rather, power is "rooted in a group's ability to

define themselves, their place in the world, and their traditions" (2006, p. 435). "Power through an Indigenous lens is an expression of sovereignty – defined as self-determination, self-government, self-identification, and self-education. In this way, sovereignty is community based ... rooted in a community's conceptions of its needs and past, present, and future" (p. 435). Power and sovereignty, then, are epistemological processes; as such, understanding Native conceptions of them should be central to the academic enterprise, especially when engaging Native learners.

Discussion

There are many, many success stories of Native American students at the university, but until the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Native students increase, a continuous and critical examination of the educational process is needed. Since a great majority of the classes that Native students take are taught by non-Native instructors, it is our belief that there is a disconnection between the instructor and the student.

Freire (1970, p. 94) asserted that many educational plans have failed because their authors (teachers) designed them according to their own personal views of reality, instead of those to whom their program was directed. Educators must be prepared so Western (European American) paradigms can coexist with Native worldviews about life's complex interconnections among peoples and with nature (Pewewardy, 2003).

Instructors in higher education must work to come to a better understanding of the diverse and complex nature of the Native American experience in the United States (McClellen & Tippeconnic Fox, 2005). Both Native American students and non-Native instructors must engage in exploring the important unanswered questions regarding the goals, expectations, and motivations of Native American students on university campuses. When the distance between teacher and student is collapsed, the student is given power. Sharing social control aids in the construction of mutually respectful relationships and two-way learning paths (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). In essence, the negotiation of power relations between the non-Native teacher and Native student is critical if the student is to be fully engaged in the educational process. Native educational theorist Calsoyas (2005) said, "The learner and teacher are both embarked on a journey of self-examination as they come together. If the mind is open, free of boundaries created by greed, selfishness, fear, pride, it is possible for differing bodies of knowledge to connect and meaning to be transmitted."

As non-Natives educators who believe in the power and possibility of self-determination, tribal sovereignty, and decolonization, we think that Native peoples have many of the answers for the culturally unique challenges they face and to suggest policy or "best methods" may be actually be contributing to the colonist actions of past educational researchers, politicians, and religious missionaries. We offer this paper, as support, to our Native friends and the Native nations seeking to build sovereignty through self-determination and education, as well as in support of non-Native educators desiring to craft inclusive learning environments and facilitate social justice. This conceptual framework is built upon the acknowledgment that there are Native students at the university who want to acquire what the university has to offer, without sacrificing their own Native culture and identity. We offer this framework as a call for those allies of Indian education to enter into an exchange of knowledge regarding the complex task a Native student faces as she walks in two worlds.

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