

***Contemporary Issues in Indigenous Education: Race, School Culture,
and the Politics of Academic Success***

by Dr. Cornel Pewewardy

Virtual Presentation to Classroom Teachers at Lawton Public Schools
Sponsored by the Indigenous Peoples' Day Committee in Lawton, Oklahoma
May 22, 2020

Introductions, greetings, and flag song:

Local Cultural Protocols, Terminology, and Setting the Stage:

Land acknowledgement: We acknowledge with respect the Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Wichita, Caddo, and Delaware speaking peoples on whose traditional territory and land the City of Lawton stands and the Southern Plains peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Friends and colleagues have asked me over the years why I start my talks, welcomes, and writings by acknowledging the Indigenous peoples whose land we reside on and my answer is always simple: It's to honor the ongoing relationship that Indigenous peoples have with their homelands—regardless of what settlers are calling it on their colonial maps.

Terminology and audience: Throughout this presentation, we use the terms Native/Indigenous when referencing Indigenous peoples. We recognize that any such terms (Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native, Indigenous) tend to gloss over and collapse the rich linguistic, cultural, spiritual, geographical, and political diversity of Native peoples and nations.¹

We use the word “settler” in reference to non-Indigenous peoples. The term settler comes from the literature on settler colonialism.² Therefore, to Indigenous educators, students and researchers, we are striving to create space for Native presence in public schools. The presentation invites local classroom teachers to join us in creating space for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty in public schools.

We also use the term “whitestream” as adapted from the feminist notion of “malestream” by Claude Denis, who defines “whitestream” as the idea that while American society is not “white” in sociodemographic terms, it remains principally and fundamentally structured on the basis of the Anglo-European, “white” experience.³

Preface and Prologue:

Indigenous Peoples' Day Motto: *Making the Invisible, Visible by Unfolding the Lessons of Colonization*
Objective for working with local classroom teachers: To collectively seek the resurgent politics of recognition premised on self-determination, direct action, and the resurgence of culturally responsive teaching and learning practices. The purpose of this workshop is to draw attention to the settler-colonial discourses and practices Native/Indigenous students continue to confront in local public schools; and help address some of the important issues in Indigenous education in southwest Oklahoma. Our aim is to make explicit the ways colonization continues to shape the educational experiences of Indigenous youth in southwest Oklahoma; focus not on whether colonization configures educational experiences, but on how colonialism continues to organize and impact Native students' educational experiences, and undermine education for self-determination and sovereignty. The ultimate point for teachers is to understand such critical urban pedagogy—not only to validate cultural identities but also to challenge students to cultivate their intellects and engage in civic acts of courage for social improvement. This is a

lot to ask of Indigenous students in urban settings, but to do otherwise is to fail to respect their amazing learning abilities, gifts of creativity, and great potentials.

This classroom teacher workshop is designed to offer suggestions to those educators who have the interest, intent, and inspiration—but who may lack the information, resources, or teaching methodology—to facilitate the achievement motivation of Indigenous students. It was also written to provide some strategies to allow other teachers to capture—and in most cases “recapture”—the real joy of a great teaching profession.

As a former kindergarten teacher, elementary principal, and teacher educator, I have a profound respect and admiration for classroom teachers and administrators. The work they do is honorable, although rarely cherished. At the same time, I recognize that many teachers and administrators have not been given the time or support to help them teach in the most culturally responsive way. I hope this explanation of why classroom teachers are not using effective culturally responsive teaching practices is a tool both teachers and administrators can use to help all students think critically about contemporary issues in Indigenous education. In my professional career, I have come to understand that people in power have long known—education can be used both to oppress and to liberate Indigenous peoples. Creative ideas are indeed powerful elements of learning.

The theoretical framework that drives this workshop consist of the following three paradigms:

- (1) What caused those problems,
- (2) What are some of the solutions to those problems, and
- (3) The implementation of those solutions.

We agree there is a treasure ready to be rediscovered and cared for in public schools in southwest Oklahoma today. Following are our assumptions for sponsoring this workshop:

- Teachers and prospective teachers care about all children, including Indigenous children.
- Teachers have a desire to teach all children, including Indigenous children.
- Teachers are interested in knowing more about how to be successful with all the children entrusted to them, including Indigenous children.

Students in pre-K-12 schools come from many different cultural groups, especially in large urban school districts like Lawton Public Schools, so it may seem impossible for teachers to learn about the cultures of all different groups. But, if teachers recognize that there are differences and that those differences are important to understand in order to teach effectively, they are more likely to be effective teachers, that is, the children in their classroom are more likely to learn. Preservice teachers sometimes worry that they cannot learn about every cultural group that is represented in school systems. That is probably true, but it is important to learn about the cultural backgrounds of the children in their own classrooms. However, even though it is not always possible to learn about every cultural group, indeed, it may not be possible to learn about each Native/Indigenous group, it is possible for classroom teachers to:

- Be aware that there are differences in the way cultural groups understand the world or process things
- Accept and respect differences and not be judgmental about them
- Learn as much as they can about the cultural backgrounds of children in their classrooms

Sometimes my preservice teachers have argued that it does more harm than good to focus on differences. They say it makes things worse when preservice teachers are “forced” to learn about other

people's cultures. They also worry that acknowledging differences promotes those differences and causes disunity within U.S. society. American history argues against this position. For most of our history, educators have ignored cultural differences, but they didn't go away. At some point in their careers, they will have to face diversity and tribal sovereignty within their classroom. They can make it work for the good of all, or they can perpetuate the failure of a substantial number of students under their care.

No social entity as complex as a school can function without considerable trust. Trust is most effective when it is taken for granted. But when Indigenous students with legitimate social differences from non-Indigenous students are brought into a school under a colorblind perspective that will not acknowledge such cultural and language differences, trouble is bound to happen. Negative stereotypes held by many whiteman educators and simple unfamiliarity with the sociocultural patterns of Indigenous students and their families compound these difficulties. One important kind of trouble on the part of whiteman adults is a fear of raising racial issues, a fear that often silences what could become a healthy, if sometimes painful, racial dialogue.

Historically, the federal government's assimilation strategy removed Native/Indigenous children from their families to attend U.S. boarding schools. Established for the sole purpose of severing the child's cultural and psychological connection to their Native/Indigenous heritage, this unique institution figured prominently in the federal government's desire to find a solution to the "Indian problem," a method of saving Indians by destroying them. When the federal government removed children from their families, entire generations lost access to Native/Indigenous parenting models, culture, language, and traditional values. The coercive assimilation policy produced schools that fail to recognize the importance and validity of the Indigenous community. Consequently, much of the community ethos retaliated by treating the school as an alien institution, one that was incongruent with traditional values and principles from sacred teachings. The process of rebuilding communities and educating or reeducating Native/Indigenous parents will require tremendous time, energy, and commitment by schools and tribal communities.

With the U.S. federal government closing down many Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools in the late 1980s, most American Indian/Alaska Native students were forced to attend public schools. Consequently, most public schools were designed to graduate students with a mainstream value system that is Eurocentric, individualistic, competitive, and materialistic. Most Indigenous educators would acknowledge that public schools have failed large numbers of Indigenous students as reflected in high dropout rates, high percentage placed in special education, suffer from the highest unemployment rates and conditions of greatest poverty in the U.S. Despite a history of genocide and forced assimilation—factors that can negatively impact family function—this American Indian/Alaska Native sample reflects a support-oriented family profile despite the co-existence of high conflict. Indigenous families are taking more responsibility for their families by working together with the professionals that teach their children.

Contemporary Issues in Indigenous Education is largely based on a critical (and self-critical), structural understanding of education. The focus of this workshop is to support and assist K-12 classroom teachers in southwest Oklahoma become culturally responsive teachers, those who are in initial teacher preparation programs and those already placed in schools. In the case of Indigenous student populations, the need to understand and attend to them is particularly urgent for reasons important to society in the U.S., not just to individual Indigenous students and their families. These reasons are:

1. At the start of the millennium, Indigenous children are the most invisible in public school settings in SW Oklahoma, meaning the ability to create space for Native/Indigenous presence in public schools.

2. They have a disproportionate, chronic record of underachievement and high dropout rate in Oklahoma public schools. Nationally, Native/Indigenous students have the highest dropout rate of any racial or ethnic group, almost twice that of white students.
3. Indigenous student underachievement places the social and economic welfare of the Nation at risk. When a sizeable group is undereducated and there is such disparity between groups, there is risk to the entire society, not just to one group or to individuals. This workshop critiques the American dream's notions of social stratification and success of the individual in racialized areas.
4. There is a potential relationship between prisons and the education of students in American culture, comparing public mainstream schools to non-mainstream schools. This workshop builds on the genealogy of educational sovereignty movements across the country offering a different, alternative educational discourse for Indigenous students allowing them to break away from traditional rigid paths of mainstream education. Local responsive research describes the relationship between the school-to-prison pipeline and the prison-industrial complex as a result of urban schools' failure to provide a proper education to students, particularly Indigenous students.

The organizers of this workshop felt that it was important to offer information and documentation that would provide the basis for the design of Indigenous content that could be infused into the regular school curriculum.

Genesis of This Work—the Rural Scenario: My academic interest in the success and failure of schools and in the high school dropout phenomenon—highly visible in southwest Oklahoma—began when in 1988 when I was interviewing and collecting data from American Indian secondary students attending Lawton Public Schools. My dissertation examined the types of socializing processes that educate American Indian students in Lawton Public Schools in ways that undermine self-determination and sovereignty. Following the teachings of Paulo Freire is a lifelong process trying to make the connection between critical education and political work for liberation. Critical pedagogy engages students to analyze inequities in their own lives and advocate for justice. Similarly, culturally responsive pedagogy situates teaching and learning within an analysis of oppression, a significant emancipatory approach to addressing disparities in public schools. Thus, this workshop is framed on a recent needs survey administered by local Indigenous educators on the realities of K-12 school life from the perspectives of Native/Indigenous parents and students. Preliminary data suggests that local public schools are deeply rooted in colonial structures and consciousness validated by survivance stories of parents and students' testimonies about everyday acts of microaggressions; and everyday acts of Indigenous erasure and assimilation in educational policy and practice.

Mentioned distressing statistics of American Indian/Alaska Native students are impediments to academic success and are not all that describe the condition of Native/Indigenous youth in southwest Oklahoma. There are some other disturbing issues that are not mentioned within town house meetings, tribal council consultations, and educational conferences that are not easily documented, such as American Indian/Alaska Native push-outs, racism in schools, forced assimilation by educators, onslaught of negative advertising and ethnic stereotyping in their communities under the sponsorship of athletic events.

As student populations have become increasingly diverse in today's schools, teacher education programs have struggled to recruit greater numbers of minority Americans into teaching, especially American Indian/Alaska Natives, and yet the teaching force has remained predominantly white and middle class. This inequity is especially apparent for American Indian/Alaska Native teachers in southwest Oklahoma. Having Native/Indigenous teachers helps students deconstruct notions of a Western model of education

and affirms a Native worldview to identify points of tension and convergence. When Native/Indigenous teachers serve in Native communities, particularly their own communities, they are less likely to leave and are positioned to encourage the transformation of existing structures and services. They also become role models for their communities' youth and provide a visible link to the teaching profession.

Nationally, most American Indian/Alaska Natives live in urban centers today; more than twice as many live in urban areas and centers than on reservations. Transitioning from rural reservations to urban environments causes some sociopolitical changes and educational adjustments in the lives of Native/Indigenous students. Indeed, urban education is different than suburban or rural education. Included in this revelation is the tacit embedding of race, class, and ethnicity. So when local educators started with the planning of this workshop, we knew that the conversation in education needed to address the needs of urban schools, teachers, students, and parents. We felt the best way to start this engagement was through sketching out a conceptual framework that takes into account the locally responsive research, previous conversations and attempts to expand and enhance this new urban discourse in southwest Oklahoma.

This workshop does not address urban Indigenous education as a deficit model. We do not believe that one is punished when assigned to an urban school, and we do not believe that students will fail because they are in an urban school. We believe that those who teach in urban schools should be prepared to be culturally responsive teachers. In order to nurture urban intellectuals, we have prepared this workshop, which will support and inform those who want to prepare urban Indigenous students to be successful in and out of school. Our work is grounded in critical theory and pedagogy, which recognizes that educators work with students within their own cultural context. The ultimate point of such a critical urban pedagogy, however, is not only to validate cultural identities but also to challenge students to cultivate their intellects and engage in civic acts of courage for social improvement. This is a lot to ask of marginalized urban Indigenous students, but to do otherwise is to fail to respect their amazing abilities, their great potentials.

My academic portfolio affirms and follows the summary of TribalCrit's Central Tenets of Indigenous education:

- Colonialism is endemic to society
- U.S. policy toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain
- Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities
- Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification
- The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens
- Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation
- Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and vision for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups
- Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being

- Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change⁴

Shifting my career from being a K-8 principal to higher education, I've tried to explore the theoretical and philosophical foundations of postcolonial Indigenous research paradigms that focused on historical and political insight into the lingering impact of colonization, considering the issues faced by Indigenous peoples today and identities to survive in the twenty-first century. Presenting the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model for almost three decades at professional conferences across the U.S., I've applied this theoretical model to the work of educational practice, primarily using case studies with Indigenous learners, systems and structures in efforts to nurture Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in educational settings toward decolonization.

Genesis of this work—The Urban Reality: Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools:

The genesis of our work is on *action* to ensure high-quality academic programs, rich in content, that are delivered within an Indigenous context and lens. The Indigenous educational context must be one in which Indigenous culture and language and the role and status of tribal society are paramount.

Why focus our teacher workshop on urban education? Given that most Indigenous children in southwest Oklahoma like across the U.S. attend public schools, focusing attention on urban education involves the fact that in the urban context one finds the emergent American culture. We know that teaching Indigenous children in rural and reservation-based schools is different than suburban or rural education. Included in this revelation is the tacit embedding of race, class, and ethnicity. Indeed, the ways in which educators shape the urban pedagogy in the coming years are central to the way American citizens reinvent the nation and sovereign tribal nations.

The sociocultural incident narrated above further heightened my critical awareness of the processes and events that disempower students of nonmainstream communities. The reasons for the high dropout rates, low performance, and lack of success of many Indigenous students in public schools were becoming abundantly clear to me early in my career as elementary principal of schools. My experience of these incidents, and many others that followed in my career is the driving force behind this critical ethnography. While interacting with students both as an elementary principal and teacher educator during these incidents, I was continually startled by the insights they would provide about their own experiences. Therefore, I decided to expose some of the sociocultural school dynamics that empower or disempower Indigenous students and their parents in public schools through their own words and experiences. This teacher workshop delivers a forum in which students and educators are allowed to define and provide material insights into the power structures that control a school's success.

We follow best practice research initiated by Montana Indian Education for All (1999)—Seven (7) Essential Understandings Regarding Montana's American Indians:

- EU 1—Tribal Diversity
- EU 2—Individual Diversity
- EU 3—Beliefs, Spirituality, Oral History
- EU 4—Reservations—land reserved
- EU 5—Federal Indian Policy
- EU 6—History from Indian Perspectives
- EU4—Tribal Sovereignty

Local case studies and testimonials by students, parents and educators emphasize the relentless nature of colonialism in public schools in SW Oklahoma. Just as important, they also represent the tenacity and enduring nature of Indigenous survivance as localized and experiential, rather than universal or abstract, phenomena.⁵

Locally responsive research also echo's our concern that Indigenous students in local public schools are struggling for a new identity usually collectively develop ambivalent views about themselves as a result of disempowering school experiences. At the same time, they debate over the appropriate course of action needed to succeed in life. In critical race theory, the school episode exposed through parent and student testimonies that document various sets of colonial relations that undermine Indigenous self-determination in public schools—everyday acts of Indigenous survivance—everyday acts of erasure, silence, and marginalization that continue as more epic colonial violence in which school climate that promote xenophobia and prejudicial feelings against Native/Indigenous cultures kill any hope for empowerment and success among the oppressed.⁶

The critical incidents narrated by local parent and student voices further heightened our awareness of the processes and events that critically disempower students of nonmainstream communities. The reasons for high dropout rates, low performance, and lack of success of many Native/Indigenous students were becoming abundantly clear to us as local educators. My (Cornel Pewewardy) experience of these incidents, and many others that followed, is the driving force behind this critical ethnography. While interacting with parents and students during these incidents, I was continually startled by the insights they would provide about their own experiences. Therefore, many local concerned Indigenous educators decided to expose some of the school dynamics that empower or disempower students in local schools in southwest Oklahoma through their own words and experiences. This workshop delivers a forum in which students, parents and educators are allowed to define and provide material insights into the power structures that control a school's success.

Finally, this workshop is grounded in genuine research in schools serving Native/Indigenous students in southwest Oklahoma. It invites educators, school administrators, and policy-makers to continue re-examining cultural hegemony in schools through listening to the voices of Indigenous students and parents themselves. Students who are struggling to find strength in their condition of being "different," who want to fully participate in the events of the world, and who want to be heard need a supportive and liberating educational experience. Ultimately, students and parents are trying to reclaim and create safe spaces in the schools that they attended with a majority of Indigenous students and families in this study.

We would like to believe that, by year 2025, Indigenous students will attain a level equal to the general student population in terms of academic and social development. Analyses of current trends, however, suggest that—without massive, effective teaching practices and strategic restructuring of Indigenous education from preschool to professional schools—such attainment is not probable.

Where Do We Stand as Educators?: Why Aren't We More Enraged?

Teachers have both the power and the presence to motivate students. An effective teacher can give a child, especially an Indigenous child, something many of their parents may be unable to give them: HOPE. With hope, there is reason to look to tomorrow. Without hope, life is meaningless, especially for Indigenous families. Without hope, there is greater propensity for negative behavior. When young people lose hope, they often wind up with an excuse of another emotion—RAGE.

There is a growing rage among many Indigenous youth. This “rage” among hopeless youth has caused many of us to live in fear and apprehension. Yet, this rage, and the dearth of hope which precedes it, can be diminished. We, as a nation, have a chance. We, as educators, have a chance to recapture the ultimate joy of our profession can—and must provide. We can make life more meaningful by motivating all students to excel as never before.

As a critical educator, however, I have varied and mixed emotions about the future of education in the U.S. in the new millennium, especially for Indigenous students. The political and social orientation in the U.S. is often polarized and at odds with itself, especially in local, state, regional, national, and international levels of education. Democratic ideals often prevail only to be later overcome in practice by provincialism and settler colonialism of a few powerful individuals who control the community’s educational dreams. Such incongruities directly affect those culturally diverse communities that have for years attempted to come to terms with poverty, educational disadvantage, and lack of opportunities. American social ambivalence is manifested in such incongruities as racial and ethnic discrimination contrasted with the insistence that equal opportunity exists.

Amid our apparent diversity as Indigenous peoples, we share a cultural heritage and a common political and economic condition globally. While most Indigenous peoples are conscious of our superficial conditions, we remain unconscious of the broader global and geopolitical scheme and our relationship to settler colonialism. More and more alienated from the core of our Indigeneity and, at times, anti-Indigenous with ourselves (a form of recolonization), we are nowhere close and free politically on the global stage. Intellectual warfare (battle for the Indigenous mind) continues to plague us, but we lack solidarity, the prerequisite for collective consciousness and mobilization to solve our problems. There is no unified force of energy and vision behind a strategy to make us whole again. In essence, many Indigenous peoples are still sleep. Transformational change in our sociopolitical condition as Indigenous people must begin with our change of mind. We must become more culturally conscious and take on the lifetime responsibility for reaching our fullest potential intellectual wellness, physical wellness, social/emotional wellness, and community/relationship wellness.

Most public schools with a large population of American Indian/Alaska Native students have Indian Education formula grant programs (Title XI and/or Johnson O’Malley add-on forms of educational intervention) which are funded by the Department of Education. These soft money federal programs are intended to supplement, not supplant, general services and supports Indigenous students on a yearly basis.⁷

The students and parents interviewed in this workshop support the findings that some whitestream educators continue to pathologize and “blame the victim” where Indigenous students are concerned. Although needed now more than ever before, educators who are willing to challenge the broader power structures and nurture alliances and collaborative interactions with academically disadvantaged students seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Part 1: Conceptual Underpinnings of Indigenous School Success and Failure: Strategies for Reclaiming Native/Indigenous Students in Public School

The information found through the mentioned resources and testimonies of students and parents in this workshop is viewed and explained by various disciplines and theoretical underpinnings. These interconnected theoretical interpretations, which have informed our understanding of the phenomenon of school success and failure among Indigenous students, do not form a conceptual framework in the conventional sense; they are a coalition of concepts that worked together as a strategy for this workshop.

The barriers to school success which confront so many Indigenous students can be eliminated. Educators have such great opportunity to enrich the lives of “hopeless” children. Their education should be the concern of all of us—policymakers, parents, politicians, businesspeople, and citizens in all walks of life.

This workshop is intended to provide information, provoke thought, and replenish those educators willing to recommit to a rigorous but rewarding approach to the academic achievement of Indigenous youth. It is offered as another resource for those effective educators seeking to add to their repertoire of teaching and learning techniques. The ideas in this workshop will help educators to:

- Develop a greater appreciation of cultural diversity, language acquisition, educational sovereignty, and intertribal differences among Indigenous students.
- Develop an understanding of how teacher expectations are formed and how they often contribute to Indigenous student failure.
- Strengthen the social and academic self-image of Indigenous youth.
- Overcome some of the school-related obstacles to long-term Indigenous student success.
- Learn more about motivating and monitoring the progress for teaching holistically: intellectual wellness, physical wellness, social/emotional wellness, and community and relationship wellness.
- Assess the performance and ability of Indigenous students more accurately.
- Discipline Indigenous students more effectively, becoming culturally responsive, and creatively.
- Develop a deeper understanding that settler futurity still guides the majority of students’ experiences in college, particularly in teacher education programs. In this sense, two mechanisms of settler colonialism—the logic of elimination and the recuperation of Indigeneity—become very apparent as students and parents share their experiences.
- Create a space where it is safe to be Indigenous on Indigenous terms.
- Develop professional development for culturally responsive and relationship-based pedagogy.

While it is important for some teachers to change their attitudes and behaviors with regard to teaching and motivating Indigenous students, it is also especially important that schools and local/state educational agencies abate some of the institutional barriers to school success for Indigenous students. Individual teachers have a unique role to play, as do policymakers and administrators, in eradicating institutional racism and its harmful effects. The existence of institutional racism in our society and our schools cannot be ignored. It can be subtle, but it is pervasive. The very existence of institutional racism can encourage teacher behavior and organizational norms which serve only to reinforce low motivation, underachievement, and poor school and life success in so many Indigenous youth.

The difference between individual and institutional racism is not a difference in intent or visibility. Institutions are fairly stable social arrangements with practices through which collective actions are taken. Individuals often respond to those social arrangements and institutionalized behavioral norms. An early study at Lawton Public Schools found that Indigenous students were highly assimilated and were not concerned very much about ethnicity or learning more about their ethnic heritage. Most Indigenous student interviewed in this study reported that American Indian Studies and Indian education programs to be unfamiliar, insignificant, or irrelevant to their education at Lawton Public Schools.⁸

Often difficult to recognize, institutional racism is covert, indirect, sometimes unconscious, and many times dysconscious.⁹ The origins of institutional racism are in our most established and respected institutional norms and societal values. All of us frequently act in ways that are socially acceptable. Yet,

much of our “socially acceptable” behavior actually reflects long-standing discriminatory assumptions and practices. When these practices become embedded in school systems, schools are likely to act to perpetuate the class differences and racial discrimination that are prevalent in society at large.

This workshop discusses some of these school-related obstacles to the achievement of Indigenous students and will offer some suggestions for eliminating these obstacles. In particular, this workshop will focus on:

- The lack of pluralistic curriculum, especially educational sovereignty
- The use of instructional strategies and teaching styles that are incompatible with Indigenous student learning styles.
- Academic tracking and ability grouping.
- Test bias.

Part 2: Unlearning Deficit Ideology and the Scornful Gaze: From the Most Numerous to the Most Invisible, Underserved, and Pushed Out of Schools

Another one of the purposes of this workshop, of this conversation among a diversity of educators, activists, scholars, administrators, parents, students, then, is to uncover, document, and trace the educational roots of deficit ideology, as well as to detail and counter their consequences. A secondary, and equally critical, purpose is to invite readers into a process of imagining a different future for public education; to consider ways of resisting the assault and constructing something more equitable and just. In this spirit, every speaker in this workshop has been asked to only to provide a critical analysis along one or more of these lines but also to imagine a just alternative and to recommend paths of resistance and ways to interrupt deficit ideology.

Briefly, deficit ideology is a worldview that explains and justifies outcome inequalities—standardized test scores or levels of educational attainment, for example—by pointing to supposed deficiencies within disenfranchised individuals and communities. Simultaneously, and of equal importance, deficit ideology discounts sociopolitical context, such as the systemic conditions (racism, economic injustice, and so on) that grant some people greater social, political, and economic access, such as that to high-quality schooling, than others. The function of deficit ideology, as I will describe in greater detail later, is to justify existing social conditions by identifying the problem of inequalities as located within, rather than as pressing upon, disenfranchised communities so that efforts to redress inequalities focus on “fixing” disenfranchised people rather than the conditions which disenfranchise them.¹⁰

Deficit ideology is a remnant of imperial history, a mechanism for a socializing citizen to comply with a host of oppressions, from colonization to enslavement, educational inequalities to unjust housing of “blame the victim” mentality applied, not to an individual person, but systemically, to an entire group of people, often based upon a single dimension of identity. At the core of deficit ideology is the belief that inequalities result, not from unjust social conditions such as systemic racism or economic injustice but from intellectual, moral, cultural, and behavioral deficiencies assumed to be inherent in disenfranchised individuals and communities.¹¹ The deficit ideologue justifies this belief by drawing on stereotypes already well established in the mainstream psyche—stereotypes which paint disenfranchised communities as intellectually, morally, and culturally deficient or deviant. Some common, sweeping generalizations and stereotypes about Native Americans that I (Cornel Pewewardy) have heard in the past two years living in Lawton, Oklahoma are: *All Native Americans are alcoholics. They’re lazy. They don’t care about education. They don’t these pay taxes? They receive special benefits and privileges from the government. What’s the big deal with playing Pocahontas at school? They overreact to their likenesses being used in school*

celebrations or as team mascots. These stereotypes, however untrue—and, as we will see, considerable amounts of research clarify that people in poverty are not, in fact, lazier, less likely to value education, or more likely to be substance abusers than their wealthier counterparts—are the deficit ideologue’s ammunition. These binary oppositions act to exclude Indigenous peoples, women, the poor, and others from the community of worthy individuals.

This sort of binary encourages all people, including those who otherwise might identify strongly with the “they,” to associate with the “we,” particularly upon witnessing the consequences of not doing so. It becomes easier, then, to train the mass consciousness to pathologize disenfranchised communities—to, in effect, blame them for their own disenfranchisement. Once that scornful gaze down the power hierarchy is in place, so the justification is established for maintaining existing social, political, and economic conditions, such as gross inequities in access to healthcare or educational opportunity, or the waning of social programs and supports for disenfranchised communities.¹² After all, if poor communities are to blame for their own poverty, they are more easily painted as being unworthy or underserving of a fair shake.

Deficit narratives about low income students, students of color, and Indigenous students telling us that it is normal and natural to expect these underserved groups to do poorly in school, have always been part of the dominant cultural landscape in the U.S., particularly here in southwest Oklahoma. Not only my own personal story at Lawton High School being told by my high school counselor that I was not college material, advising me that I should follow the path of my father (Ft. Sill Indian School graduate)—going to the U.S. Army—because “you guys make good soldiers” or suggesting that I attend the new vocational institute in town because “you guys are good with your hands.” That public school horror story is fifty (50) years old, but just as fresh as I hear other local Indigenous students retell this same story of low academic expectations from public schools in southwest Oklahoma.

Hearing similar stories of low teacher expectations in high school these past two years, I thought I was the only one told these types of deficit stories about the professionals who were in charge of my public school secondary education. Like many other Indigenous students going to public schools in southwest Oklahoma, our family has a rich tradition of transformational leaders. For example, Aunt Dorothy Lorentino’s 1918 court case with Comanche County opened the door for all American Indian/Alaska Native children to attend public schools in Oklahoma. A brief abstract of the court preceding follows:

In the District Court of Comanche County, State of Oklahoma (1918)...Defendants (Cache Consolidated School District) state that they should not be required to admit as a student known as Dorothy Tabby-Yetchy, should not be admitted as a student in said school for the following reasons, towit: That the said Dorothy Sunrise is not a fit person to be admitted into said school that she is infected with a dangerous and contagious disease; that she has been exposed and is being continually exposed to a dangerous and contagious disease, towit; that she is unsanitary; that she associates with children and persons who have dangerous and contagious and infectious diseases; that she is uncleanly and filthy; that she associates with children and persons who are uncleanly, unsanitary, and filthy.

Architects of colonial, racial, and ethnic ideology, such as Cache public schools in southwest Oklahoma declared Native/Indigenous students as unclean, filthy, and unsanitary. It is intriguing to read official 1918 court battle like Dorothy Lorentino’s resistance to attend public schools in the state of Oklahoma. Trying to interpret this watershed equity moment in time today is part of Oklahoma history, a useful example of the intersecting stands of white supremacist ideology in U.S. federal Indian policy and Jim Crow

segregation policy. Simultaneously in the early 1900s, the U.S. was still in the throes of allotting Indian lands and pursuing a policy of coercive cultural assimilation. The Dorothy Lorentino court case happened before American Indians were granted official U.S. citizenship in 1924. As a result of local racial segregation policies and federal neglect, racial and ethnic identities in Jim Crow Southwest Oklahoma became tightly intertwined with asserting distance from Indigeneity, most prominently through a refusal policy to allow American Indian/Alaska Natives to attend public schools and other demonstrations of anti-Indian racism. The early 1900s educational work of white architects of Indigenous education indeed possessed the colonial mentality, an ideological stance that can be attributed, in part, to the political history of the country during that era in U.S. history. This historical investigation into the political and ideological foundations of the “miseducation of Indigenous peoples” in southwest Oklahoma is timely as the Dorothy Lorentino story helps to explain the structuring of segregated education that has plagued the U.S. for much of the 20th century.

For sure, Dorothy Lorentino’s 34 years teaching special education is a local success story of Indigenous resilience that spans a century examining how policy makers denied her and all American Indian children from attending public schools in U.S. Dorothy’s story also provided the resurgent leadership in the struggle to overcome systemic racism and equity barriers for American Indian children in southwest Oklahoma. Because of her powerful story, Dorothy Lorentino was named the 1995 Elder of the Year by the National Indian Education Association and thereafter, as the only Native American teacher inducted to the National Teachers Hall of Fame. Dorothy Lorentino was a proud citizen of the Comanche Nation.

Survivance stories like Dorothy Lorentino is a method of supporting, mentoring, and negotiating my role, relationship, and responsibilities as an Indigenous researcher working locally with Indigenous youth and families. Retelling survivance stories is a method of contesting colonialism, reflecting and affirming my research, and reconnecting to a long legacy of Native survivance in southwest Oklahoma. My hope is that Indigenous students, educators, and researchers find the following testimonies useful, and draw from these stories or develop their own methods of reflection, affirming, and making connections to our shared legacy of survivance.

Part 3: Introducing Student A (videotape of survivance storytelling)

Part 4: Introducing Student B (videotape of survivance storytelling)

Part 5: Introducing Parent A (videotape of survivance storytelling)

Part 6: Acts of Erasure and Resistance in the Lawton community

As a teacher educator of multicultural education, I project the reasons and resistance of many classroom teachers not using effective teaching practices for Indigenous learners is similar to Nancy Gallavan’s 1998 study of 113 graduate students in teacher education. Gallavan identified more than 50 reasons why teachers aren’t using effective multicultural education practices. As the themes began to emerge in her study, students organized their reasons into five major categories to better manage and understand their data. The five major categories included:

1. Teachers do not know or understand what multicultural education is
2. Teachers do not know how to use effective multicultural education practices
3. Teachers are not motivated to learn effective multicultural education practices
4. Teachers are resistant to learn effective multicultural education practices

5. Teachers do not realize their full responsibilities as educators for using effective multicultural education practices¹³

Contrasting this multicultural resistance to effective teaching practices for Indigenous learners could very well be the same dilemma. Likewise, all teachers, staff, and administrators need to see and experience effective teaching practices for Indigenous students that provide safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environments. They will continue to be dropouts or “pushouts” until conditions within their communities improve and public schools better understand how to ensure the use of culturally responsive teaching pedagogy with Indigenous learners.

Part 7: A Framework for Maintaining White Privilege: A Critique of Ruby Payne

Ruby Rayne’s (2005) decade-long dominance of the class and poverty discourse in education, despite the inaccuracy of the culture of poverty paradigm and the many false stereotypes¹⁴ like those mentioned previously in this manuscript, is another important symptom of this layer of socialization. A cursory reading of most any example of her work reveals the ways in which the culture of poverty paradigm continues to be used to socialize people—in this case, teachers—into deficit-laden misperceptions about poverty and low-income people.

The widespread consumption of Payne’s theories across disciplines highlights the salience of race and class inequities and speaks to the absence of practical educational strategies that confront these inequities. But while Payne and her “framework for understanding poverty” may be a new phenomenon in the education community, the ideology that forms the bases for her “practical solutions” is not new. In fact, the ideology has framed (and has been framed by) sociological and anthropological theories that have caused controversy for decades. By framing the “culture of poverty” in behavioral terms rather than economic ones, scholars advocating poverty theory suggest that it is poor people’s behavior more than their economic plight that is problematic.¹⁵

I agree with Jawanza Kunjufu that talking about poverty does not help African American or ethnic minority children. Ruby Payne’s theory is based on the idea that there is something wrong with African American or ethnic minority children, a deficit model based on the idea that there is something wrong with children in poverty, and we need a workshop to describe what is wrong with them. Talking about poverty to teachers does not help Indigenous children. Her theory is based on the idea that there is something wrong with African American children, and in our case, Indigenous children. The deficit model is prescribed and based on the idea that there is something wrong with our children, and we need a workshop to describe what is wrong with them. There is no serious discussion in most public schools about the history of genocide, forced assimilation, breaking of treaties, land-grab lotteries, and other distressing statistics that are the foundation for designing educational strategies to foster the ideology of white supremacy. Teachers and students today need to know that colonial educational practices and philosophies are still supported by the dominant educational power structure in the country.

Payne’s work is popular because it places blame on individuals and their culture while underemphasizing the role of institutional and systemic factors that facilitate social, economic, and political exclusion. Critics often highlight that promoting commonly held racial stereotypes and maintaining current power structures are key contributors to Payne’s success. But the discourse around “race” and “racial” stereotypes usually revolves around people of color. This, however, ignores a critical component of racism: Whiteness and the facilitation of white privilege and white supremacy. Therefore, by situating poverty with individuals, Payne leaves current power structures intact.¹⁶

Thus, by negating or omitting race from the discourse on poverty, Payne facilitates in masking white privilege. Whites, then, from all classes including the poor, fail to see how their whiteness grants them unearned privileges and advantages and they remain complicit in a system of inequality.¹⁷

When discussing the concept of “race,” it is essential that whiteness be unmasked and explicitly identified as it is what allows racism to exist. The marginalization of people of color is not racism in itself but represents the results of white privilege and white supremacy. The “culture of poverty” theory advocated by Payne is rooted in a gendered and sexualized discourse of whiteness. Examining Payne’s work using this lens may provide insight on why such discourses as the “culture of poverty” continue to be recycled and consumed by society.¹⁸

In order to understand the world for which we live in today, it is vital to know our history. Unfortunately, the history we are taught through the mainstream educational systems and corporate entertainment industry is false, particularly its depiction of European colonization as inevitable (or even justified) and Indigenous peoples as helpless victims (or even willing participants). The story of our ancestors’ resistance is minimized, at best, or erased entirely. This strategy has been used to impose capitalist ideology on people, to pacify them, and to portray their struggle as doomed to failure.

Throughout U.S. history Indigenous peoples have been characterized as “problems.” Such a description necessitated finding solutions, and schools as purveyors of assimilation became natural laboratories of research. Within this educational context researchers have investigated the “Indian problem.” This deficit model was an especially important dominant themes of research studies up until the 1960s, when community-based ethnographic or long-term research studies argued for a “cultural difference” model that addressed power relations. To many Indigenous researchers, Indigenous peoples have been studied more than any other ethnic group in this country.

We cannot ignore the negative feelings and treatment of Indigenous peoples in a racist society. White settler hero worship illustrates a western frontier mentality of “how the west was won.” Subsequently, “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” is an American aphorism uttered by General Phillip Sheridan during the Plains Indian campaigns of the 1860s and at one time this frame of mind was considered a tenable, even popular, solution to the so-called “Indian problem.” Thus, a 100-year legacy of deficit theory has guided this assimilation ideology within Indigenous education.

Part 8: Creating Space for Self-Determination and Sovereignty in Public Schools (Colonialism in the Classroom)

The cognitive dissonance between Indigenous peoples and mainstream Euro-American teaching practices has existed at least since colonial times. Consider the following quotation by an Iroquois leader named Canasatego. In June of 1744, the commissioners of Maryland and Virginia sought to entice the Six Nations of Iroquois into a treaty by offering to educate a number of First Nations boys at William and Mary College. The next day, Canasatego, speaking for the Iroquois, gave the following reply.

“We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges and that the Maintenance of our young Men while you would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you who are so wise must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things and you will, therefore, not take it amiss if our Ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same as yours. We have some Experience of it . . . We are however not the less oblig’d by your kind Offer tho’ we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentleman from Virginia

will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take great care of their Education, teach them all we know and make Men of them."

Some educator might scoff at the suggestion that such an "Indigenous Education" might be preferable to an American education. However, if we consider tribal educational methods of teaching and learning during Canasatego's time, we might find several virtues. Indigenous societies integrated education into everyday life, allowing children to work both individually and in cooperative groups where they could share their accomplishments. Most importantly, children learned by doing, and their lessons were culturally responsive and often immediately applicable in their lives.

Historically, the U.S. federal government's assimilation strategy removed Indigenous peoples from their families, and entire generations lost access to traditional parenting models, culture, language and values. In reality, Indigenous peoples were defeated not by military force, but by politically structuring educational institutions for Indigenous students to mold a European colonial ethos. Contrary to the doctrine of manifest destiny and the imposition of settler colonial educational systems, many tribal nations had their own diverse educational systems. These traditional educational systems were culturally responsive to their needs—designed to give education informally through parents, relatives, elders, and spiritual/social groups. In essence, traditional Indigenous educational practices provided the skills needed to any tribal society to function adequately within their natural environment. Overall, early U.S. federal educational policy has largely ignored the fact that Indigenous peoples had a sophisticated and powerful educational process. The American educational system promotes a system-maintaining curriculum that perpetuates oppression through the strict control of all aspects of home living and the adoption of official curriculum. Students need to know that colonial educational practices and philosophies are still supported by the dominant educational power structure in this country.

One act of exercising educational sovereignty is claiming Indigenous space. Reclaiming and reacting to educational space issues in public schools today is quite a challenge. Many school policymakers and administrators tend to frame their "safety zones" within a logic of containment on their terms. For example, patterns of control and containment can be witnessed in school district's perception of cultural heritage and difference. It's very common for mainstream administrators to invite local singers and dancers to demonstrate their cultural skillsets in southern plains powwow cultures or to ask a local Native princess to perform the Lord's Prayer before large international festivals, ethnic heritage events, or multicultural assemblies. However, when a Native student asked permission to wear their tribal regalia to graduation ceremonies despite a school's "no adornment" policy—cultural difference becomes threatening and intolerable.¹⁹

Ultimately, Indigenous students can achieve success in school while maintaining cultural integrity by claiming educational space as their own, participating in Native/Indigenous-led student events and activities, and sharing their survival tactics online, consequently taking ownership of their own educational experiences. For two years as the Educational Liaison for the Comanche Nation, I (Cornel Pewewardy) confronted microaggression stories that focused on teaching and learning in classrooms within southwest Oklahoma public schools. Indigenous parents calling me during the fall 2019 Thanksgiving holiday, whereas Indigenous students were called upon to play the "Indians" during a Thanksgiving play at a local elementary school. This survivance story points to the subtler colonial discourses that could be difficult for young children to detect, such as the ways Eurocentrism tacitly permeates the curriculum.

Another recent story on colonialism in the classroom came during Halloween when a group of elementary teachers came to school dressed up as Walt Disney Hollywood-Themed princesses. One of

the elementary teachers dressed up in a Pocahontas Hollywood-Themed Halloween Costume. Again as the Educational Liaison for the Comanche Nation, I was called by one of the Indigenous parents whose daughter was in the elementary class of the teacher dressed up as Pocahontas. Once this news was posted on Facebook by some of the Indigenous parents, the group of teachers dressed up as Hollywood-Themed princesses responded on Facebook that the Pocahontas character depiction was appropriate because the elementary teacher was Native American herself. I called the superintendent of the public schools and informed him of my role to represent citizens of the Comanche Nation. Over the telephone on that same day, the superintendent assured me that they talked to the teacher (Comanche citizen) and “everything was okay now.” Of course, in a follow up meeting with the superintendent the following Monday, we discussed this act of colonialism in the classroom. Still today, some family members of the elementary teacher said: “I don’t understand what the big deal is.” The survivance story illuminates the pervasiveness of colonial discourses and how they can even distort understanding between Indigenous peoples, particularly around issues of identity and authenticity.

These survivance stories illustrate why educators must not only pursue concrete and conceptual forms of knowledge, but also relational and political commitments to disrupting dominant discourses that constrain Indigenous students’ well-being and educational opportunities in schools. Consequently, public schools are a space that may be experienced as one-dimensional, primarily concerned with the mind but lacking in physical and spiritual development, which may lead students to a life in need of balance.

Other case studies of colonialism in the culture of schools include settler-focused pageantry on the Oklahoma Land Run, heritage-day colonial reenactments that reflect themes of Manifest Destiny, grotesque cartoon figures of Indians used as sports mascots, Native American Heritage Month as “feel-good events” and containment policies for wearing traditional regalia during graduations. As a collective, these case studies highlight the ways that colonization continues to shape Native/Indigenous students’ experiences in schools. One of the goals of this workshop is to develop educators’ anticolonial literacy so that teachers can counter colonialism and better support Indigenous students by creating space for self-determination.

Part 9: Toward a Self-Definition of “Success” and “Culturally Responsive and Relationship-Based Pedagogy”

The whitestream American myth of success is based on two assumptions: First, that the U.S. is a land of opportunity for all—meaning anyone coming to the U.S. can rise from poor circumstances based largely on one’s own worth and hard work. Second, that race, creed, and background are not barriers to success—therefore, a lack of success is an indication of a lack of personal desire, effort, or ability to accomplish personal and professional career goals. These assumptions are perpetuated when whitestream teachers present cultural values, ethics and principles that reflect European culture.

Deconstructing the American myth of success can be accomplished best through culturally responsive teacher education training which includes a study of history of all ethnic groups that might be found in the present and future classrooms. Without this core training, it is doubtful that underrepresented groups, especially Indigenous students, will experience the academic success necessary for success in life.

Traditional Indigenous educational beliefs did not incorporate the American concept of “success” into their teaching and learning. The role of many traditional Indigenous educational teaching processes was to systematically assure that their educational systems reproduces and refines the best of itself and by doing so, passing on to the next generation its accumulated wisdom, and the knowledge and skills

necessary to develop, maintain and participate in the society of the future. Therefore, the real mantra of success is sustainability and growth.

Most Indigenous peoples place importance on the principles and values, rather the traditional American concept and definition of academic success. The ideal personality for many Indigenous cultures is person who shows kindness to all, who is steeped in spiritual and ritual knowledge—a person who goes about their daily life in good relationships and approaches life as a responsible relative in a sea of friendship, and full of goodness. Principles and values drive these characteristics, ability to display bravery, hardiness, and strength against enemies and outsiders. This is the way it used to be for many Indigenous peoples and nations.

Consequently, the concept of success tends to be secondary to traditional Indigenous ways of incorporating creative planning for interconnected teaching and learning that focuses on the whole child. By integrating holistic wellness as a curriculum framework, Indigenous educators rely on this concept metaphorically and practically to describe the four cardinal directions—the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional learning processes with harmony and balance, thereby achieving healing and wholeness. Hence, placing children at the center of place-based education immerses students in local cultures, landscapes, opportunities, and experiences, from their own historical settings, is key to fostering educational excellence. Thus, holistic balance and peace of mind follow the person who develops a clear sense of their highest priorities and who lives with focus and integrity toward them.

Educational success in the Western, American concept is usually defined and measured by standardized tests. Standardized test forced upon states, localities, and regions usually results in a collectivist “testing culture” that negates the unique heritage, dialects, and values of Indigenous peoples. Rather than perpetuating an academic “success” driven colonial discourse, Indigenous communities and educational systems are reclaiming, renaming their traditional knowledge systems—articulating their own scholarship that validates Indigenous systems, theories, and philosophies. It is critical to understand that quality education must be based on Indigenous educational methodologies not only to ensure our survival as Indigenous peoples, but for our very existence as human beings.

Keep in mind that the original U.S. government’s concept of educational success was to send Indigenous children to boarding schools as a means of forced assimilation, segregation, and subjugation. Boarding schools grouped Indigenous children along tribal lines that later facilitated intertribal comparison. The added variable of language differences offered still another dimension of educational psychologists in their discussions and debates of mental capacities; opinions expressing the need for Indigenous students to absorb the white culture in order to improve them “innate inferiority” (as measured by early IQ tests) were frequently discussed. The BIA boarding school experience is just one example of how the educational system has not met the needs of Indigenous children.

Many traditional learning theories and methodologies did not measure mental capacities like Western instruments like IQ testing. In a relational worldview or model of learning, Indigenous teachers were grounded in their logic that says cause has to come before effect. In contrast, the relational worldview sees life as harmonious relationships with the four-legged, winged-ones, and water-beings where health is achieved by maintaining balance between the many interrelating factors in one’s circle of life. One example of traditional relational teaching and learning is how not to measure mental capacities of the young. Traditional relational teaching and learning strategies were to teach the young how to survive in the world; how to be a good relative; and contribute to the overall health of the family. Not once did I ever witness or hear that the four-legged, winged-ones, and water-beings measured the mental

capacities of their young—they always did what they’ve always done for generations by demonstrating and showing their young how to achieve success by modeling culturally responsive teaching strategies. Accordingly, I value the concept of inner success just as much as outer success for personal congruency and effectiveness for healthier, growing relationship with other human beings, four-legged, winged ones, and water-beings.

The current systemic design of whitestream teaching and learning for many Indigenous students is a recolonizing process. The natural patterns of critical thought are not holistic, but built upon a foundational, Eurocentric knowledge bases. The majority of our children, as well as the last six or more generations, have been so socialized into the dominant culture that few were ever able to think critically and holistically, outside of colonial patterns. If more of our generation had been socialized more critically we would have a stronger counter movement to critique and challenge the current sociopolitical system.

Today’s hyper-accountability movement is an essential tool of the neoliberal agenda—a data driven system for assessing teacher effectiveness or “merit,” the “value” teachers add to student achievement and/or student achievement using high-stakes standardized tests. It is important to point out that these standardized tests do not measure critical reading or writing nor critical thinking skills. Standardized test scores are really just a smokescreen that the corporate class wants to use to define “progress” in terms that suit their interests.²⁰

It is amazing in the twenty-first century that white perceptions of non-white peoples continue to be deficit laden and inscribed by fear. Not only do many whites believe that Native/Indigenous students are cognitively deficient, but also that urban “ethnic” street culture contradicts dominant white values such as the work ethic, generational improvement, socio-economic mobility, self-sufficiency, family values, and sobriety. In the twenty-first century, urban educational policies and curriculum development is grounded on a set of tacit social assumptions that:

- Take for granted non-white deficiency
- Ignore various modes of racial and class-based oppression
- Accept the pathologization of Native/Indigenous peoples for opting not to choose “good values”
- And never challenge the justice and fairness of the larger social order.

Operating from this ideological climate, many public-school teachers simply do not expect urban Indigenous students from poverty-stricken communities to be good students with high potential to do well in colleges and universities. Ultimately, teacher expectations profoundly influence student performance. Culturally responsive teachers realize that they must understand the insidious and complex ways that teacher expectations of urban Indigenous students are constructed. The prevailing politics of knowledge in the twenty-first century creates an information climate that supports deficit view of Indigenous students.

Our intent is not to argue that Indigenous students and families do not want to be academically successful, nor to suggest that academic success is proof of assimilation. On the contrary, we want Indigenous youth and families to value education and have long expressed desires to be academically successful in schools—the ability to be Indigenous on Indigenous terms. Again, our attempt is to bring attention to the ways Eurocentric criteria continue to be the standard-approach, benchmarks against which Native/Indigenous success is measured, rather than other possible educational outcomes like knowledge of place, literacy of one’s own history and culture, ability to meaningfully contribute to one’s tribal community, etc.

Culturally responsive and relationship-based pedagogy focuses on helping teachers shift the nature of pedagogy in their classrooms in a way that enables Indigenous students to participate and learn. This pedagogy may require teachers to learn new knowledge and skills for effectively teaching Indigenous students as well as unlearn deficit theorizing within the context of technical-rational models of professional development in teacher education. In subsequent student and parent interviews, we show what the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy looks like (or not) in classrooms in southwest Oklahoma. We fully recognize that these interviews focus on classroom pedagogy addresses one significant layer of a much larger system of institutional disparities and control. However, for students and their parents, what happens in the classroom is central to their learning as Indigenous students.

Part 10: Students' and Parents' Concerns and Interventions for Educational Reform in Southwest Oklahoma

The students and parent testimonies in this project raise a number of issues related to equality of outcomes in educational institutions in the U.S., and particularly in southwest Oklahoma. The politics of success that interferes with Indigenous students' educational aspirations is the focus this project. For the many surveys that were administered over the span of three years in Comanche County, Indigenous students continue to confront high dropout rates, their experiences in public schools illuminate why so many of their peers fail to thrive in the typical public school settings in southwest Oklahoma.

In the case studies, the reasons for failure became evident as students', parents', and teachers' cultural worldviews were enacted within the context of the meanings and ideologies of an urban public school system. As these distinct worldviews interacted, there was an obvious lack of mutuality in cultural and educational expectations. Essentially, there was a huge cultural mismatch between the school's culture and student's culture, especially in the pedagogy of teaching and learning. At the same time, there was a lack of common educational objectives not only between the teachers and the Indigenous students but also among the teachers themselves. Unmet educational expectations and negative interactions with teachers and school administrators heightened the students' feelings of isolation, lack of personal worth, and the perception that high school was a waste of time.

Survivance stories by the students and parents all focused on teaching and learning in classrooms. Each of the following episodes reflect colonialism in the classroom and sporting events:

- Pilgrims and Invented Indians
- Thanksgiving holiday
- Halloween Costumes and Native Identity
- Native Sheroes and Complex Personhood
- Heritage Day Celebrations and Reenactments
- Oklahoma Land Run Reenactments
- Indian mascots, invented ceremonies and manufactured traditions (Hanta Yo)
- Sports announcers continually mispronouncing athletes' last names and/or making derogatory comments about their last names during games and live-radio
- Patriotic ceremonies, songs and flag symbolism during school-related events

It was very upsetting that the concept of "good teachers" and "good teaching" continues to be defined in ways that encompass considerable knowledge gaps about Indigenous histories, politics, perspectives, or contemporary issues, making it difficult to support Native students specifically. These common-sense definitions to good teaching perpetuate, rather than challenge the oppressive status quo of schools and

society. Subject classroom teachers' inability to detect hegemonic constructions of Indianness impeded the dexterity teachers needed as culturally responsive teachers to work against colonialism's varied mechanisms. One of the student's testimonies talked about his actions to not only educate his peer, but the teachers too, thereby illustrating everyday colonialism in the classroom—doing the extra work of educating his classroom teachers of dysconscious episodes at school. Synthesizing this episode academically, the problem is not the teacher(s), but rather working within incongruent school environments and teacher education programs in which teachers graduate socially unprepared to respond to Indigenous students or issues specifically. Through these multiple microaggressions from student interviews, teachers such as described reflects individual illiteracy and ignorance of these cultural issues, such ignorance is also systemic and collective.²¹

The logic of control and containment were witnessed in the public school's understanding of cultural difference. For example, Indigenous students were frequently asked to invite singers and dancers at multicultural events, heritage days, or to bring in a local "Indian" princess to perform the Lord's Prayer prior to an assembly. On the other hand, when the expression of cultural difference threatens school policy—as in a Native student's desire to wear traditional Native regalia to graduation ceremonies despite a school's "no adornment policy"—cultural difference becomes threatening and intolerable.

If schools are social constructions, it is vital that they be examined from the point of view of those most affected by those constructions: Indigenous students themselves. Although the small sample size and case-study approach limit the generalizations that can be drawn, the in-depth nature of this study and its authentication of student voices provide a foundation for drawing out implications and "lesson learned." The most important lesson is the students' urgent call for educational reform. This workshop presentation addresses the effect of educational institutions as forms of cultural hegemony and domination. At the same time, it includes students' and parents' recommendations for transforming the educational institution in order to enable academic and self-defined success. The students' concerns, recommendations, and beliefs are summarized under the topics of (a) administrative and school climate changes, (b) systemic school reforms, and (c) transformations in teacher-student interactions.

Administrative and School Climate Changes

Two areas of concern addressed by both students involved the school's consistency of performance patterns among Indigenous students across different indicators and measures of school achievement. The other is the variability of achievement of subsets of individuals within ethnic groups, such as Indigenous students. These characteristics suggest the need for systematic, holistic, comprehensive, and particularistic reform interventions, simultaneously.

The underachievement of Indigenous students has been spotlighted again and again over several generations in southwest Oklahoma, and the situation has not gotten any better. It may even have worsened in recent years. It is also true that some of the disparity in academic achievement across ethnic groups is attributable to racism and cultural hegemony in the educational enterprise. But to declare this is not enough to direct a functional and effective change agenda. More constructive reform strategies must be employed. Professional development for culturally responsive and relationship-based pedagogy should meet these needs.

Both students and parent voices talk about cultural incongruences with public schools in southwest Oklahoma, a concept that I call "dysconscious racism." It's an ineffective teaching phenomenon and systematic mismatch between the school's culture and the student's culture that denotes a limited and distorted understandings that many classroom teachers have about inequality and cultural diversity—

understandings that make it difficult for them to act in favor of truly equitable education. Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given. Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant whitemainstream norms and privileges. It's not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. Content analysis of the students and parent responses show how mainstream teacher's thinking reflects internalized ideologies and dysconscious racism that both justify the racial status quo and devalue cultural diversity.

Part 11: Students' and Parent Recommendations

More than ever, Indigenous children need educators who can help them navigate and thrive in a world of great diversity, educators who can give them and their families the tools to make the world a fairer place for themselves and for each other. Therefore, the first recommendation proposed by the lone parent interview and supported by the two students described the school's lack of professional development for culturally responsive and relationship-based pedagogy. Evidence-based research shows the extent to which a well-conceptualized and culturally grounded program in culturally responsive pedagogy, supported by a well-conceptualized professional development program, can shift teacher practices and understanding of Indigenous cultures and languages.

This recommendation takes up the question of how teachers can be supported in learning to work with culturally responsive pedagogy, given the cultural, experiential, and social gaps between whitemainstream teachers and Indigenous students. Ideally an emancipatory approach would staff schools with teachers who bring a critical consciousness and a keen understanding of students' lives and cultural backgrounds. Overall, research on teacher professional development for culturally responsive pedagogy is thin, examining impact on teachers, but not on students. None of the case studies reviewed focused on culturally responsive pedagogy. Most case studies that have been done explore the impact of specific kinds of professional development programs, such as a series of workshops on Ruby Payne's theory on poverty. By contrast, educational workshop gurus like Ruby Payne, and others who blame students and their families for the achievement gap and advise repressive management techniques and advocates pedagogies that certainly do not facilitate teachers' understanding that the "gap" is rooted in economic, cultural, and racial inequality in both school and society.

Unfortunately, there is lean systemic research into how teacher professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy changes teacher practice, let alone impacts on students. This researcher suggest how school systems conceptualizes the nature and basis of disparities is important in the design of professional development for culturally responsive pedagogy. One can distinguish between two quite different designs: technical-rational designs in which experts teach pedagogical practices to teachers, and design that attempt to reposition teachers as learners in relationship to their students and students' communities.

Survivance emerges in the everyday acts of students, parents, and families as they try to create spaces of possibility within their respective public schools.²² In their engaging personal stories and testimonies, students and parent interviews make crystal clear the pervasiveness and cruelty of racism. But these voices refuse to acquiesce. Instead, they fill their teaching and learning days with everyday acts against overt and subtle bigotry. Desire to react becomes an antidote to damaged-based narratives. Despite its pain and justified anger, their inspiring and hopeful support for their children in public schools is filled with helpful ideas and ways to take action.

The second recommendation proposed mostly by the two students was to implement an anti-racist, anti-biased education in the school curriculum. Multiple microaggressions in everyday life of Indigenous student testimonies have led many parents and students to seek out local and statewide resources to address issues of race and inequality with young children. Anti-racist or anti-biased education offers practical guidance to early childhood educators (including parents) for confronting barriers of prejudice, misinformation, and bias about specific aspects of personal and social identity; most importantly, it includes resources for adults and children to respect each other, themselves, and all people. Most of the survey feedback as echoed by the parent and student voices had similar concerns: we need educators who can analyze colonial discourses in educational policy and practice and who are committed to countering colonialism at every turn. Such literacy and commitments are necessary if we are to better serve Native students in public schools.

The third recommendation was to redefine the roles of teachers and administrators. If we are serious about facilitating the conditions for the success of Indigenous students, educators and administrators must redefine their roles with respect to the status of Indigenous students and their communities. This includes, first and foremost, teacher roles. Should a teacher restrict his or her role to that of being a simple transmitter of knowledge? Should a teacher ignore a school environment in which cultural tensions and conflicts are affecting student learning? Or should he or she create the conditions for cross-cultural dialogue, thereby opening opportunities for student empowerment? Most educators and respondents to this presentation reflected a sense of conformism and powerlessness with respect to reversing the conditions of oppressed groups and to improving the school environment. Public school teachers should not remain neutral about issues of race and ethnicity. Sustaining a learning community must include both negative and positive episodes in the students' daily lives and critical interrogations on the meaning of difference.

Helping Classroom Teachers Know Themselves as Cultural Beings

It is critical for classroom teachers to have an understanding of the development process of their own self-awareness and ethnic identity. Teachers must engage their students in more than superficial knowledge, whether self-revelatory or academic. Goals of teacher education programs and professional development training should emphasize that teachers begin to develop their own theories of practice, which should include ways to support learners who are less like themselves in terms of culture, race, class, and ethnicity. This process is facilitated through a professional development workshop so named the "cultural being paper." The subject of race construction allows teachers to understand their own ethnic identity as well as the various ways in which Indigenous students develop their own ethnic identity. Thus, the ultimate goal of the "cultural being" assignment is to assist teachers' development of their own cultural identity, thereby enhancing their ability to cultivate successful students who have a better understanding of their own cultural identities. In this way, teachers become culturally responsive to their students' needs.²³

Developing teachers' concrete and conceptual knowledge

- Recognize the ongoing marginalization and erasure of Indigenous peoples in the curriculum
- Learn from rather than about Indigenous peoples
- Understand that Indigenous identity politics is complex and ongoing
- Recognize and nurture Indigenous survivance
- Recognize and affirm educational sovereignty and self-determination

Unkind Words and other Language of Savagism

Contemporary terminology and images have a great impact on how we as Americans think and view each other. When individuals shout out to you “hey chief,” the internal system and consciousness saps the psychic and spiritual energy of recipients. Unsolicited unkind words and phrases are painful and cause multiple microgressions. Words in the American lexicon are powerful and important, no matter what age and level of grade in which we learn them. Moreover, American slang can be damaging to students, especially young children. Perhaps the most frequently occurring topic in historical American slang are these ethnic slurs like “hey chief,” “low man on the totem pole,” “let’s powwow,” “hold down the fort,” “circle the wagons,” “here’s comes the cavalry,” “one-little, two-little, three-little Indians,” “Pocahontas,” “redskin,” “squaw,” and many other names and phrases, most of them directly dehumanizing. All of these words and terms are externally imposed concepts and therefore contribute to unkind, racist language. Thus, these terms become institutionalized and used to describe populations.

The recognition of racism in the English language is an important first step. Consciousness of the influence of language on our perceptions can help to negate much of that influence. But it is not enough to simply become aware of the effects of racism in conditioning attitudes. While we may not be able to change the language, we can definitely change our usage of the language. We can avoid using words that degrade and dehumanize people. We can make a conscious effort to use terminology that reflects a progressive perspective, as opposed to a distorting perspective. It is important for educators to provide students with opportunities to explore racism in language and to increase their cultural awareness of it, as well as teach terminology that is culturally responsive and does not perpetuate negative human values and experiences. Because many of us, adults and children alike, are often silenced by prejudice, it is imperative to prepare children for encounters with prejudice so they will be more likely to speak up as allies for one another.

Sample Observations of Unconscious Bias in southwest Oklahoma schools and City of Lawton

- Tobacco store named “Chiefs Smokin Icehouse”
- Medical marijuana dispensaries named “Big Chief Collective” and “Shaman”
- Streets named after Indian killers like Phil Sheridan and George Armstrong Custer
- Military helicopters and missiles named “Tomahawk,” “Blackhawk,” and “Comanche”
- Elementary schools named after slave owners and Indian killers
- Lawton High School’s tradition, usage of term “Hanta Yo”²⁴
- Indian mascot sports theatre at smaller SW Oklahoma schools
- Teachers playing Hollywood’s Pocahontas as Halloween costumes
- Native students asked to play Indian during Thanksgiving reenactments
- Native American Month: Native performance or spectacle?
- Sports announcers unable to pronounce last names correctly
- Unkind words by educators (mentioned in earlier paragraph)
- Invisible tribal flags at public spaces and events
- Containment policies prohibiting Native students from wearing traditional regalia at graduation ceremonies
- Unclear/ambiguous school mission statements and philosophies concerning diversity and inclusion
- No equity lens in long-range strategic planning
- Lean community engagement with local sovereign tribal Nations
- No featured speakers, events, panels or platforms to address tribal sovereignty
- Confederate icons displayed in public spaces

Part 12: Conclusion

This presentation adds to the growing body of research for substantial changes in the way public schools serve Indigenous students in southwest Oklahoma. Some educators and critics of multicultural education and critical race theory contend that social class inequities are reproduced when students fail and when their communities do not offer good modeling. In actuality, the problem lies in the imposition of dominant values, principles, and patterns within the context of the “politics of success” implemented from a monocultural prevailing perspective.

“Success” in social institutions—schools—is usually measured by the acquisition of the culture of those in power. Adolescents from middle-class homes and from dominant ethnic groups tend to perform better in school than those who represent low-income, non-mainstream groups because the school’s culture and power structure is congruent with the culture of dominant middle-class families.

The Indigenous students in this workshop not only resisted overt assimilationist curriculum norms, but they opposed the hidden curriculum and the external definitions of success that ultimately interfered with their own aspirations to mobility in this multicultural society. If public schools hope to reverse the pattern of failure and attrition among Indigenous students, conscientious efforts must be made to prepare students to function in a multicultural, intertribal, and global environment. A serious commitment is needed at all institutional levels, first to recognize and value the contributions of diverse communities and, second, to manifest this recognition in a just and inclusive school curriculum and organization. Such a commitment also requires the implementation of programs that can reduce the cultural distance between teachers, their students, and communities. Only through an accurate knowledge about students and their communities will an understanding of their worldviews, learning styles, and needs emerge. Since knowledge and culture are interrelated forms of capital, public schools bear the responsibility of cultural mediation as well as education. If Indigenous students are to succeed, they must be guided toward knowledge of the wider society while at the same time given recognition and respect for the tribal sovereign *knowledge* they already possess.

Notes

- 1 We use the word “Indigenous” in reference to the original peoples of what is now named North America. We recognize Indigenous as synonymous to Native, Native American, American Indian, Indian, First Nations Peoples, and First Americans—all with a connection to global Indigenous communities.
- 2 Simply put, settlers are people who came to the North American continent from other parts of the world. These states and settler-serving institutions are political and social institutions that have been shaped and organized to serve white power structures and they conform to the interests of the states founded on that objective. See Taiaiake Alfred *Wasase: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom* (University of Toronto Press, 2009). Writing from a settler perspective primarily for other settlers, Paulette Regan avoids the trap that so many non-Native scholars fall into—telling Native people how we must live. Instead, she means that non-Natives must struggle to confront their own colonial mentality, moral indifference, and historical ignorance as part of a massive truth telling about Canada’s past and present relationship with the original inhabitants of this land. For more information settler-colonialism, see Paulette Regan *Unsettling the Settler Within* (UBC Press, 2010).
- 3 We use the term “whitestream” as coined by Canadian sociologist Claude Denis to signify that while society is not demographically white, it remains structured around white, middle-class, privileged experiences. For more detailed information, see Sandy Grande *Red*

- Pedagogy: Native American social and political thought* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).
- 4 See Brian Brayboy "Toward a tribal critical race theory in education" *Urban Review: Issues and ideas in public education*, 425-446 (2005).
 - 5 See Leilani Sabzalian, *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools* (Routledge, 2019), xiii.
 - 6 See Leilani Sabzalian, *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools* (Routledge, 2019), xiv.
 - 7 See Leilani Sabzalian, *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools* (Routledge, 2019), 10.
 - 8 Cornel Pewewardy "Perceptions of American Indian High School Students in Public Schools," *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 26(1), 52-55, (1991).
 - 9 We use the term "dysconscious" and/or "dysconscious racism" for individuals or groups of people who exhibit whitestream knowledge, cultural protocols, and uncritical thinking; so far removed from the daily perceptions, cultural lifeways, and unaware reality of Indigenous peoples. This concept is more than having a colorblind perspective. It's built upon cognitive imperialism.
 - 10 See Roberta Ahlquist "The Empire Strikes Back," *Assault on Kids* edited by Roberta Ahlquist, Paul Gorski and Theresa Montano (Peter Lang, 2011), 11.
 - 11 See Roberta Ahlquist "The Empire Strikes Back," *Assault on Kids* edited by Roberta Ahlquist, Paul Gorski and Theresa Montano (Peter Lang, 2011), 25.
 - 12 See Paul Gorski "Unlearning Deficit Ideology and the Scornful Gaze" *Assault on Kids* edited by Roberta Ahlquist, Paul Gorski and Theresa Montano (Peter Lang, 2011), 153.
 - 13 Nancy P. Gallavan "Why Aren't Teachers Using Effective Multicultural Education Practices?" *Equity & Excellence in Education*, (1998).
 - 14 See Jawanza Kunjufu *An African Centered Response to Ruby Payne's Poverty Theory*, (Images, Chicago, 2006).
 - 15 See Jawanza Kunjufu *An African Centered Response to Ruby Payne's Poverty Theory*, (Images, Chicago, 2006).
 - 16 See Paul Gorski "Unlearning Deficit Ideology and the Scornful Gaze" *Assault on Kids* edited by Roberta Ahlquist, Paul Gorski and Theresa Montano (Peter Lang, 2011), 154.
 - 17 See Hollie Anderson Kulago "In the Business of Futurity: Indigenous Teacher Education & Settler Colonialism," *Equity & Excellence in Education*, (2020)
 - 18 See Paul Gorski "Unlearning Deficit Ideology and the Scornful Gaze" *Assault on Kids* edited by Roberta Ahlquist, Paul Gorski and Theresa Montano (Peter Lang, 2011), 165.
 - 19 See Leilani Sabzalian, *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools* (Routledge, 2019), 11.
 - 20 See Roberta Ahlquist "The Empire Strikes Back," *Assault on Kids* edited by Roberta Ahlquist, Paul Gorski and Theresa Montano (Peter Lang, 2011), 17.
 - 21 See Leilani Sabzalian, *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools* (Routledge, 2019), 50.
 - 22 See Leilani Sabzalian, *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools* (Routledge, 2019), xv.
 - 23 See Cornel Pewewardy, "American Indian and white students talking about ethnic identity in teacher education," *Action in Teacher Education*, 24(2), 22-33.
 - 24 A host of Lakota scholars led by JoAllyn Archambault and Richie Meyers stated that "Hanta Yo" in the Lakota language roughly translates to "look out" or "get out of the way" in the Lakota language. They both feel the term in out of educational placement and cultural context for a high school moniker sports motto or branding war cry for a public high school. Basically, the storyline of the book is fictive and presents a distorted literature that presents a stereotypical, grand narrative of the Lakota people. The author of the book titled *Hanta Yo* is Ruth Beebe Hill, a non-Native writing about the lifeways of the Lakota. Subsequently, the local high school (Lawton High School) still uses this motto, even though the location of the school is physically located on the former territories of the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache

southern plains territory in Oklahoma, not northern plains nor northern states where the original context of the *Hanta Yo* story is located.

Reference citation:

Pewewardy, C. D. (2020, May 22). *Contemporary Issues in Indigenous Education: Race, School Culture, and the Politics of Academic Success*. Commissioned report by the Indigenous Peoples' Day Committee, City of Lawton, to Lawton Public School teachers and administrators and surrounding public schools in Southwest Oklahoma.