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The principal assertion of this article is that Indigenous research methodologies should be used to develop educational policies and practices for Native students. The history of American educational research is marred by a near complete dismissal of Indigenous knowledge, as Western research methodologies continue to define the landscape of P–12 education decision making in the United States. The purpose of this article is to embrace inquiry that draws on the Indigenous wisdom germane to Native communities. Otherwise, our educational policy and practice may continue to be dictated by a Western orientation and methodologies that have neither served us well in our past nor will serve us well in the future. The article begins with a historical overview and then focuses on current issues affecting school leadership (P–12), as they relate to the education of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians (and by extension, other Indigenous students). The article addresses the following areas: challenges to Western research methodologies, culturally relevant education, the development of school reform, and ideologies governing P–12 leadership development programs. To conclude, the article advances a rationale for including Indigenous research methodologies in the development of curriculum standards and testing programs.

This article is intentionally broad in scope to provide the non-Native readership with the necessary historical perspective of the challenges Indigenous peoples have experienced in mainstream higher education. Its primary purpose is to support ongoing efforts among school leaders to promote the perspectives of Native people. Discussions regarding the value of culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous student populations are not novel. As early as 1928, research studies have cited the importance of tribal culture in Indian education (Meriam...
However, such research findings have not been used in the past or the present to affect policy or practice in mainstream educational settings to improve the educational attainment of Native students. The principal goal of this article is to impart the urgency of leveraging the useful knowledge base derived from Indigenous educational research in the development, implementation, and evaluation of educational policy and practice.

The article begins with a brief historical context to understand why Native people today are forced to justify the value of what they know, what they want to teach their children, and how they want their children to be taught. Next, we challenge Western research methodologies, providing evidence for a paradigm shift to embrace the voices of Native people in education policy and practice. We then discuss culturally relevant education and the positive impact it has had on Native student educational achievement. The next section, on school reform, calls for school leaders to be involved and steadfastly committed to using Indigenous educational research to improve the landscape of Indian education. The subsequent section, on ideology, asks school leaders and critical stakeholders at the state and federal level to learn about Indigenous knowledge and wisdom. In the conclusion, we advance a rationale for including Native voices in nationwide curriculum standards and testing programs.

A Brief Historical Context

Despite centuries of government-sponsored efforts to eradicate Native culture, many Native nations continue to argue for the importance of including Indigenous perspectives. The desire to include these perspectives has endured in the face of colonization and the long historical struggle Native people have experienced in the United States, indicating the importance of this desire to many Native nations. Myriad authors have offered chronological accounts of...
the history of American Indian education (Fraser 2001; Grande 2004; Reyhner and Eder 2004; Spring 2008; Szasz 1999). Despite some variations between these perspectives, a prevailing theme is power—power over who controls and defines education for Native youth. Here, we provide only the brief historical context necessary to understand our primary argument that Indigenous perspectives are essential to educating Native students.

The movement to “de-Indianize” or “civilize” Native people stems from the colonial notion that savages should be transformed from their evil ways. Protestant epistemologies served as the vehicle to assimilate Native peoples to the mainstream culture. It is ironic that these early settlers had ancestors who fled their homelands to seek religious freedom, when they were eager to impose their own values on others. The history of public schooling in the United States is grounded in a system in which Eurocentric ideologies delineate the landscape of public education for all students. In other words, nonwhites are denied the right to define what education should be for their own people. Hence, remnants of cultural genocide continue to define mainstream education, as demonstrated by the educational system’s continued failure to fully incorporate the perspectives of Indigenous cultures and other nonwhite heritage in the design and delivery of educational programs and services.

Spring (2008) describes the manipulative efforts of the US federal government to civilize Indians through makeshift educational programs. After the American Revolution, the US government directed attention to expanding its territorial control by acquiring the land of Native people in the south and the west with as little expense to the government as possible. The fledgling federal government’s strategy to educate Native children was to exercise paternalistic oversight and authorize boarding schools under missionary control. In doing so, every effort was made to dehumanize the Native children and remake them in the image of White America. Under George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, the government developed the strategy of educating through civilization programs and convincing Native people to sell their land to the government. In both cases, the ulterior motive was to encourage Native people to abandon their traditional reliance on the land and, instead, adopt the Eurocentric practices of husbandry, agriculture, and the acquisition of possessions (Spring 2008, 123–24).

Although religious missions maintained some level of control through the late nineteenth century, Grande (2004) posits that the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830 marked the beginning of the federal government’s control over Indian education (12). The Indian Removal Act authorized President Jackson to exchange tribal lands in the west for land in the eastern states. One result was the appointment of the commissioner of Indian affairs in the US Department of War. The primary duties of the commissioner were to oversee the vocationally focused Indian educational system and address
issues with tribes removed from eastern states (13). Commissioner T. Hartley Crawford designated manual labor schools as the best model for educating Indians in farming and homemaking (Reyhner and Eder 1992, 39).

Boarding schools followed the day school movement. Many boarding schools were off-reservation and populated by Native children who had been forcefully removed from their Native communities. Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) chronicle the establishment of off-reservation Indian boarding schools funded and supported by the federal government in the late 1800s. According to Lomawaima and McCarty, many believed Native culture was full of savage and primitive behaviors, which must be reformed if Native people were to survive. The perception was that day schools were ineffective in disconnecting children from their tribal heritage, as these schools still allowed Native children to maintain day-to-day contact and interaction with their Native ways of life. Governmental officials deemed deculturalization would not be achieved without completely removing children from their tribal communities and its influences. In essence, they believed that off-reservation boarding schools would facilitate “Americanizing” Native children.

In 1879, military officer Richard Henry Pratt established the first off-reservation Indian boarding school, the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (US Office of Indian Affairs 1905, 41). Pratt, like many early colonists with Eurocentric ideologies, believed the tribal way of life was “uncivilized,” and therefore, students must be acculturated in order to be more “civil” (Lomawaima and McCarty 2006, 47). His infamous slogan was “Kill the Indian and Save the Man.” Interestingly, Pratt was initially convinced that Indians would excel to the levels of whites if provided with “equal educational and vocational opportunities” (48). However, this belief would soon be replaced with the notion that Native students were inferior to their white counterparts. Native students were frequently mislabeled as incapable of learning, as a result. These misguided fallacies, perpetuated by Western epistemologies, would not only mar the landscape of Native education but also serve as the guiding principles for an educational research methodology that fails to recognize the value of Indigenous cultures. Residential boarding schools functioned to remove and isolate children from their tribal communities and the influence of Native tradition, while exercising forced assimilation into America society. This effort to annihilate tribal cultures serves as a frame of reference for the caution Native people exhibit against mainstream researchers.

In summary, Native people have been historically subjected to paternalistic ideals of Western “civilization” that undermine their integrity. For too long, Native children have been viewed as less than human, and their only salvation has been to learn how to live as non-Natives in a world that does not recognize or value their Indigenous knowledge and ways of being. This trend must end, if we are to embrace a meaningful and sustainable movement to transform
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mainstream education to be more respectful and inclusive of Native efforts to reclaim their dignity. Research, couched in Western methodologies mirroring the guiding principles of obstructionist mainstream educational systems, will not contribute to the transformative change necessary for a careful examination of these cultural challenges faced by Indigenous student populations. For this reason, many Native scholars have cited the need for educational research that challenges the inappropriate application of Western methodologies and epistemologies.

Challenges to Western Research Methodologies

The belief that mainstream Western perspectives are intellectually superior can be interpreted simply as yet another justification to seize control of Native culture. For many Native people, the proliferation of research conducted primarily from Western perspectives has perpetuated the notion of American Indians as a race of people threatened by extinction, if not altogether extinct. As a result, many non-Natives mistakenly believe that there are no “real Indians” left. For more than a century, Western researchers have seized the opportunity to define Indian identity in the name of advancing Western scholarship. However, where we still live and breathe, our voices resonate across the land and await those whose sensitivity and training enable them to heed the voices of Native children, families, and communities. This is the paradigm shift that educational leaders need to embrace, if we are to color in the whitewashed policies and practices proved to be inadequate to stimulate the curious minds of Native children.

A foundational tenet of American educational research is that all students must be educated within a framework that benchmarks performance to white, middle-class peers. This educational model, grounded in the marginalization of Native students, is the point of first departure for many Native scholars in the field of Indigenous educational research. The need to recover power to define the educational landscape for Indigenous youth is among one of the most significant battles waged in Indian Country. Native scholars also recognize the negative impact of many Western research paradigms in the field of Indian education. Much of this research has been conducted using constructs of Eurocentric ideologies that reject the value of Indigenous epistemologies.

Historical Overview of Research on Native Communities

A brief overview of the historical context of research on Native communities is necessary to understand Native peoples’ effort to retain and safeguard their
tribal cultures against the exploitation of unethical researchers. It is estimated that nearly 95% of the Native population was decimated by disease, war, enslavement, and systematic eradication between European arrival and the early nineteenth century. Thornton (2005) estimates precontact Native populations at approximately 12 million; however, by 1900, this number was reduced to approximately 375,000 (23–24). Assuming that American Indian tribes would soon become extinct, a movement by those in the field of American anthropology began the campaign to collect as many representations of Native culture as possible (e.g., pottery, wood carvings, textiles, baskets).

During this period of salvage ethnography, one particular expedition sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution of the Southwest seized nearly 10,000 artifacts from a Zuni tribe for public display in a museum. This indiscriminate collection of tribal culture, by the Smithsonian and many other Western researchers, in the name of scholarship included the unauthorized seizure of human remains (Lomawaima 2000, 3). For nearly 2 centuries, research in Native communities was dominated by the seizure, commercialization, and prostitution of Native culture. It was not until the twentieth century that researchers were held to ethical standards in the field of anthropology that respected the rights of tribes to control research involving tribal remains and other artifacts deemed sacred. As a result, a number of these items have been repatriated or returned to the tribes from which they were taken (Hunter 2004, 164).

Smith (1999) issues a call for the decolonization of research methodologies that work to invalidate Indigenous culture. She states, “The word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (1). Smith describes the negative connotations Indigenous peoples associate with research grounded in European imperialism and colonialism. Smith expresses her disdain with the inhumane tactics exercised among tribal communities in the name of scientific research: “Just knowing that someone measured our ‘faculties’ by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are” (1).

Lowery (2010) provides a similar recollection from Lumbee history. The history of the Lumbee Tribe is a saga of ongoing challenges to their tribal identity, as the tribe worked to gain federal recognition. Although located in isolated rural areas of southeastern North Carolina, the Lumbee were not immune from the imperialistic methods, assumptions, and theories employed by Anglo researchers. As a state-recognized tribe, the Lumbee are not eligible for the programs and supports provided to tribes recognized by the federal government; however, under the Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act, tribal members who were one-half or more Indian blood were eligible for
employment and education benefits (Lowery 2010, 127). Their existence as an organized group of Native people also made them subject to research.

Carl C. Seltzer, a Harvard anthropologist, arrived in Robeson County in the late 1930s to test 209 Lumbees who were applying for recognition by the tribe. Seltzer took photographs of the Lumbees as part of his anthropometric tests to determine each applicant’s quantity of Indian blood (Lowery 2010, 181). At that time, scientific theories of “Indianness” were based on head shape and size, skin tone, and hair texture—none of which reflect Indigenous beliefs about tribal identity. On the basis of Seltzer’s Western ideological definition of “Indianness,” only 22 of the more than 200 Lumbees were identified as “one-half or more Indian” (182). The inaccuracy of these Western methodologies often labeled one sibling as “more than one-half Indian,” while another child in the same family was categorized as “less than one-half Indian” (197).

Deloria (1969) offers a scathing condemnation of anthropological research as a “summer retreat of useless observations for which books are published with the researcher as sole beneficiary” (86). Anthropologists receive the brunt of criticism from Deloria because this field of study was commonly associated with research on Native communities. As Deloria explains, American Indian tribes have frequently been perceived as a vehicle for the scholarly advancement for the researcher, with no recognizable benefit to the tribe. “The massive volume of useless knowledge produced by anthropologists attempting to capture real Indians in a network of theories has contributed substantially to the invisibility of Indian people today. The anthropologist thus furnishes the justification for treating Indian people like so many chessmen available for anyone to play with” (86). There is an indication that many American Indian people were not quite conscious of the detrimental effects of providing researchers with an unfettered gateway into the sanctity of their communities. In response, Deloria conveys a call to action for tribes to establish criteria for policing entry to tribal communities in the name of research (99).

**Shifting Paradigms**

Fortunately, Lomawaima (2000) has identified a paradigm shift that has occurred in American Indian education over the last several decades as Native people assert their “inherent right to self-governance and independence” (3). The 1960s birthed a generation of minority groups attuned to civil rights agendas (Reyhner and Eder 2004). American Indians were among those groups who sought equal rights through the efforts of organizations such as the American Indian Movement. In addition to changes in civil rights, the balance of power in research conducted on Native people began to shift as
Native people exercised a greater role in determining the policies governing research in their communities. Similarly, this demand for equality was particularly evident in American Indian education, as Native people sought a participatory role in the education of their children.

More recently, Human Subjects Research codes (45 C.F.R. 46) have resulted in an increasing number of tribes across the Nation forming their own institutional review boards to establish protocols for conducting research in their tribal communities or seeking professional service organizations to administer research with their tribal members. For example, the Rocky Mountain Tribal Institutional Review Board (RMT-IRB) was established in 2010 as an administrative body serving the member tribes of the Montana and Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council by providing IRB resources or in some cases serving as the IRB of record. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Policy Research Center serves a similar purpose in disseminating information to support tribal leaders in regulating research in their communities, while providing relevant research data to support informed decision making in Indian Country. For example, the NCAI Policy Research Center has examined the success rate of Native students in advanced placement (AP) courses, the application of Indigenous pedagogies in AP courses, and the assessment of Native student learning outcomes in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields.

In support of tribal communities, some institutions of higher education have also established research centers for the support of Indigenous-based projects to address socioeconomic, health and welfare, and educational needs of Native people, while protecting tribes from potential research exploitation. For example, in partnership with the Native communities in Arizona, the University of Arizona established the Native Peoples Technical Assistance Office (NP-TAO) to serve as the conduit for research in the local Indian communities. In addition to supporting local tribes in establishing their own IRB protocols, NPTAO works to ensure that researchers are following proper and appropriate procedures when conducting research with Native peoples in Arizona.

As sovereign tribal nations continue to oppose the marginalizing effects of conventional colonizing research paradigms, educational researchers are challenged to answer the “Who? Why? and What?” questions to defend their research agendas in Indigenous communities (Lomawaima and McCarty 2002). This paradigm shift affords Native peoples a greater level of influence in determining the educational policies and practices in Indian education and in validating the role of Indigenous knowledges in improving the educational landscape for Indian youth.
Importance of Authentic Voice in Educational Research

Mimicking the calls for increased participation in the conduct of research, literature in the field of Indigenous educational research emphasizes the value of incorporating the “voice” of Native people when examining their experiences within the context of mainstream educational settings. For this reason, many Indigenous researchers in the field of Indian education suggest incorporating qualitative data as a vital complement to the quantitative data typically used in many educational studies. Examining mainstream education through the lived experiences and perspectives of Native students is a valuable tool for teachers and school leaders to transform mainstream education. Evidence of such research is found in a growing body of literature on such issues as the struggles of first-year teachers, effective strategies for novice teachers, recommendations for improving teacher induction programs, and a plethora of other topics that incorporate the voice of those being researched (Gilbert 2005; Quinn and Andrews 2004; Wayne et al. 2005).

Swisher (1998) concurs that research methodologies used to examine issues in Indian education should incorporate Indigenous “voices, stories, and perspectives” to present a more accurate view of the educational experiences of Native peoples (190). She joins other scholars in their opposition to the telling of Indigenous educational experiences through a limited “outsider’s perspective” (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000; Innes 2009). Swisher asks, “How can an outsider really understand life on reservations, the struggle for recognition, sovereignty, economic development, preservation of language and culture?” (1998, 194). The “outsider” perspective, which has often been used to suggest what is needed to educate Native students, has traditionally determined the landscape of mainstream education and has marginalized Native students. As Swisher and others point out, Indigenous perspectives add depth and authenticity to research in American Indian education.

Culturally Relevant Education

Unfortunately, many publications on Native cultures, which serve as guiding principles for non-Native educators and school administrators, are written from the biased perspective of non-Native scholars. For example, history textbooks either exclude the presence of tribal nations in US historical accounts or present stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples. Biased research methodologies based on European American imperialism serve as the frame of reference for many non-Native P–12 educators. Hence, the contributions of Native people and other persons of color have been “whitewashed” with
one-sided perceptions of history. Incorporating authentic Indigenous knowledge in mainstream educational decision making is vital in order to diminish the biased perceptions of tribal culture present in many mainstream school environments. The solution to transform mainstream education lies in learning about and using the culturally relevant education that still exists in Native communities.

Mainstream educational policies and practices are replete with irrelevant curriculum and pedagogy that have an adverse impact on Native academic achievement. The consequence is an unacceptable rate of failure—a failure not of Native children but of the system to educate Native children and keep them engaged in their schooling. Addressing these shortcomings will require educators to recognize culturally relevant elements that are critical to capture the interest of Native children in the nation’s classrooms. Findings from the Indigenous-based research projects discussed below demonstrate a relationship between educational success and a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy informed by life experiences of Native people. Mainstream educators and policy makers will find that best practices, as developed from the knowledge gained in Indigenous educational research studies, can transform mainstream education to meet the needs of Native children, families, and communities.

In this section, we provide several examples of culturally relevant education for Native students. One such research project that could serve as a model for others is the Hawaiian Cultural Influences in Education, a collaborative effort of Kamehameha Schools, the Hawaii Department of Education, and Nā Lei Na ‘au’ao, an alliance of Hawaiian-focused public charter schools. The goal of this project is to understand and share best practices of culturally relevant education in Hawaii’s classrooms. On the basis of survey responses from approximately 7,000 teachers, students, and parents/caregivers, the researchers concluded, “Culturally responsive educational strategies help students to feel engaged and connected to what they are learning. When used routinely, CBE [culture-based education] practices can positively impact both socio-emotional and educational outcomes for students” (Ledward et al. 2008, 1). The connection between culturally responsive education and improved socioemotional and educational development represents the circular nature of culturally responsive educational strategies in this Hawaiian community. From Ledward et al.’s framework, we suggest the following best practices for culture-based education:

1. Active participation of family members in educational activities
2. Using the community as a setting for student learning
3. Rigorous assessments accounting for a range of competency and skills
4. Place-based and service learning projects promoting community well-being

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Many non-Native educators struggle with feelings of inadequacy based on their limited knowledge of Indigenous cultures. This often results in irrelevant educational experiences for Native students. Ledward et al. provide assurance for those educators who seek to incorporate Indigenous knowledge in their mainstream educational settings, writing that “teachers do not have to be experts themselves in providing students with a culturally relevant educational experience. Instead they can harness the knowledge, skills, and experience of family and community members for the benefit of their classes” (2008, 1). Despite cultural differences among the scores of tribal nations, educators can adapt Indigenous best practices such as those listed above to transform mainstream educational settings to improve educational attainment of Native youth.

Another example of culturally relevant education is the Learning for Understanding through Culturally Inclusive Imaginative Development project (LUCID), a 5-year (2004–9) research partnership between Simon Fraser University; the Haida, Stó:lo, and T’simšeyan First Nations; and British Columbia School Districts 33, 50, and 52. This project aimed to use the concept of imaginative education combined with culturally relevant components applicable to First Nations students. Similar to Indigenous tribes in the United States, Canada’s First Nations Peoples seek to reform public educational systems to provide culturally relevant and emotionally engaging environments for their students. They did this in the LUCID project by incorporating imaginative education, a way of teaching and learning that is based on engaging students’ and teachers’ imaginations in the learning process. Nielsen (2010) elaborates on the concept of imaginative education: “When we imagine, this activates not only the parts of the brain linked to emotions but also the part of the brain where logical processes mainly take place (the cortex). In other words, if we engage students’ imagination, we will engage their affective domains while the learning content is being processed, resulting in a more enjoyable and memorable learning path” (414).

Through participant interviews, Nielsen (2010) reports the following findings from the LUCID project. Teachers shared that project success was predicated on the sense of community established by positioning imaginative teaching and First Nations culture at the core of the endeavor. This sense of community fostered a confidence level among non-Aboriginal teachers who once felt inadequately prepared to incorporate First Nations culture into their pedagogical techniques. Project success was also predicated on creating processes that valued Indigenous culture, as well as project participants who respected the value of etiquettes and protocols associated with instruction in First Nations tribal communities. Although some challenged the validity of imaginative education, Nielsen asserts, “The strength of LUCID may well turn out to be
its holistic approach,” which is represented in Indigenous cultures where the deficiencies of one component may be offset by the strengths of another (425). Nielsen concludes with a notion shared in many Indigenous educational research studies—the incorporation of one’s Native language is a critical component in creating a culturally relevant learning experience for Indigenous learners (431).

As evidenced in Nielsen’s examination of the LUCID project, non-Native educators can indeed participate in the process of reforming educational systems for the improvement of Native learners, but only when Indigenous knowledge is at the core of this process. With the proper training in First Nations ways of knowing, non-Aboriginal educators were equipped with the knowledge and the confidence to provide their students with a culturally rich learning environment. This concept of recognizing and respecting the value of Indigenous culture is applicable to educational reform endeavors in tribal communities across the globe. Notwithstanding differences that exist among the myriad Native nations, the knowledge gained from Indigenous research can serve as the catalyst to transform current Western educational systems that may often impede the educational success of Indigenous peoples.

A final example of culturally relevant education is the work of research centers in New Zealand. The University of Waikato faculty of education at the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research focus on promoting culturally relevant Māori education through projects such as learning journeys from early childhood into school, teaching strategies used in mathematics by Māori students, and teaching and learning under the supervision of Māori doctoral students. Similarly, the New Zealand Association for Research in Education sponsors a journal for scholars to disseminate educational research to improve the landscape of mainstream education for Indigenous students throughout the world.

These examples represent a shared research agenda focused on using Indigenous educational research to improve the experiences of Indigenous students in Western educational settings. Whether the discussion centers on the educational experiences of North American tribes or Aboriginal people in New Zealand, scholars have a plethora of opportunities for collaborative research initiatives with Indigenous research methodologies at the heart of their endeavors. Opportunities for sharing knowledge should not be limited to educational scholars, however. These transformational partnerships should incorporate the knowledge of tribal elders and other community stakeholders, as well as students’ voices. Researchers and scholars in the field of Indigenous educational research acknowledge the challenges that a monolithic perspective can create in discussions of educational reform. For this reason, a diverse group of stakeholders is necessary for these collaborative partnerships in In-

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digienous educational research to actualize the transformational change necessary to create culturally relevant education in P–12 classroom settings.

Culturally Relevant Education in the P–12 Classroom

Curriculum based on Western ideologies creates boredom and academic disengagement for Native students, leading approximately half of all Native students to consider leaving school before graduation. In a comparison of national high school graduation rates for the 2005–6 school year, only 50% of Native students graduated from high school, in comparison with 76% of their white classmates (Alliance for Excellent Education 2009). Further, the literature detailed below demonstrates that a lack of culturally relevant teaching in mainstream educational systems is a primary factor contributing to the achievement gap between Native students and their Caucasian peers. The studies discussed below in the area of culturally relevant teaching are available to mainstream P–12 educators to guide curricular and pedagogical decision making to establish culturally relevant environments for Native students. An examination of such research will answer some of education’s critical questions: “How do we define culturally relevant teaching for our Native students?” “What works?” and “What does not work?” What is important to note here is that when we rely on Western educational research and what it tells us about teaching, without including Indigenous knowledge about what works with Native students, we fail to adequately respond to the needs of Native children. The educational experiences of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students must have relevant cultural connections. This claim is not newfound knowledge but derived from insights provided throughout the history of schooling Native people in the United States.

Following many years of the US government’s miseducation of Native children, Lewis Meriam was commissioned in the 1920s by the US Department of the Interior to examine the education of American Indians. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) credit this publication, known as the “Meriam Report,” as the first officially recognized call for culturally responsive schooling for Native children (944).

Fraser (2001) depicts the Meriam Report, published in 1928, as “a turning point of sorts and the beginning of a slow reorganization of federal priorities in Indian education” (154). In this report, Meriam and his colleagues challenged the general philosophy and practice of federally operated Indian boarding schools that led to the forced removal of Indian children from the home environment. Instead, he recommended the following community model for tribal schools:
[The] modern point of view in education and social work lays stress on upbringing in the natural setting of home and family life. The Indian educational enterprise is peculiarly in need of the kind of approach that recognizes this principle; that is less concerned with a conventional school system and more with the understanding of human beings. . . . The methods must be adapted to individual abilities, interests, and needs. Indian tribes and individual Indians within the tribes vary so greatly that a standard content and method of education, no matter how carefully they might be prepared, would be worse than futile. (Meriam Report, cited in Fraser 2001, 156)

Meriam also discredited the use of standardized curriculum and textbooks. He asserted that Native children must find a direct relationship between the curriculum and their own life experiences. His analogy of the Native child residing in the desert who is incapable of visualizing the relationship between the curriculum and the ship sailing on the sea still represents one of the significant challenges with standardized testing for our Native children in mainstream educational settings (Fraser 2001, 157). For many of these children, the questions contained within these assessments are not relevant to their home or community lives, nor are they adequate indicators of students’ true abilities. Meriam’s suggestions are consistent with modern descriptions of culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Pewewardy and Hammer (2003), there are several critical elements of culturally relevant pedagogy. These include cultural literacy; self-reflective analysis of one’s attitudes and beliefs; caring, trusting, and inclusive classrooms; respect for diversity; and a transformative curriculum.

Nearly 1 century after the publication of the Meriam Report, Native people continue to struggle for equality of opportunity in mainstream education. Fraser (2001) cites inadequate government funding as a primary factor in the deficiencies in American Indian education (154). Under recent federal government administrations, the crisis in education has been perpetuated by budget cuts and the one-size-fits-all scope of legislation, which devalues the educational needs of American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other minority groups. This is reminiscent of the ill-fitting and inappropriate system of educating Indian children that has been forced on Indigenous people since early colonization. The end result is a disconnection between tribal culture and the ethos of mainstream educational settings where many Native students struggle to achieve in the classroom.

The system of miseducating Native students is not necessarily due to a lack of knowledge of how to educate Indians. Ironically, educational research delineating the need for culturally responsive schooling has been dismissed in the development of overarching educational and curriculum policy making. Indigenous educational research projects, as previously cited, document evi-
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Evidence that a positive relationship exists between culturally responsive schooling and the academic achievement of Native children. Such relevant data are imperative to decision making within the federal government, state boards of education, local school boards, and public school classrooms. Despite the availability of such vital information, mainstream public school settings preserve Eurocentric ideologies, which marginalize the culture of Native students. Further, educational systems operated or funded by the federal government and other governing bodies often operate under the neocolonial notion that they know how best to educate Indian students and, thus, continue the cycle of limited educational access and equity for Native youth.

Mainstream public school systems would benefit from recognizing the importance of Native perspectives in curriculum design and pedagogy. Content areas such as history, literature, and science should highlight aspects of Native cultures. As previously mentioned, history curricula should feature the contributions of great Native leaders such as Chief Joseph (Nez Perce), a voice against the social injustices of American Indians, and the great orator Chief Red Jacket (Seneca). Likewise, literature courses must blend the writings of well-known Native authors such as James Welch (Blackfeet), N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), and Sherman Alexie (Spokane). Indigenous contributions to science, such as those made by Colonel William Pogue (Choctaw), the first American Indian astronaut, and Ely Samuel Parker (Seneca), who served as the principal consultant to the first scientific study of an Indian tribe, must be interwoven into the mainstream science curriculum.

Non-Native teachers must be educated to recognize the oppressive nature of failing to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in all content areas and of failing to foster a culturally relevant educational experience for Indian children. Using Indigenous educational research will allow curriculum decision makers to lessen the injustices associated with excluding the rich contributions of Native peoples from standardized texts defining the content of P–12 curricula. This whitewashing of Indigenous culture in mainstream public education helps to fuel the stereotypes and biases that exist in the dominant society. It is common for these stereotypes to define non-Native perceptions of tribal culture and thus create misconceptions of what is culturally relevant for Indian students. Indigenous educational research serves to challenge these stereotypes by defining culturally relevant teaching and providing the accurate research necessary to improve public education for our Indian students.

One such study, conducted by Gilliard and Moore (2007), investigates how culture shapes school curriculum on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Because a large portion of the US teacher workforce is of European American descent, Native children and other racial and ethnic minorities experience challenges in establishing a relevant connection between the culture of the school and the culture of their family and community. In response, Gilliard and Moore
asked, “How then do we prepare the predominantly European American teaching force to strengthen the connection between home and school cultures for children of diverse backgrounds?” (251).

In their study of three tribal early learning programs, findings illustrate the following major themes: (a) respect and honor the beliefs and practices of the family; (b) participate in various tribal rituals and traditions, such as powwows, to create the necessary sense of belongingness and community to connect family and community with the school environment; and (c) foster parental involvement in program curricula (Gilliard and Moore 2007, 254–56). These recommendations are especially useful for educational leaders as they work to embrace culturally relevant education and are just one example of the wealth of knowledge available in Indigenous educational research to educational leaders for transforming mainstream education for Native students.

Similarly, the leadership for the Anchorage School District (2013) uses information gained from research for programmatic decision making to improve the academic achievement of Native children. Project Ki’L (pronounced kal’uh, a Dena’in word for boy) is a Title VII Indian Education program dedicated to demonstrating the relationship between culturally responsive education and higher academic outcomes for preschool to fifth grade Alaska Native and American Indian boys. Myriad resources are available to students, parents, and educators to chart a path of success tailored to the needs of the child. Project Ki’L is a product of P–12 school leaders incorporating Indigenous educational research to develop a transformational initiative to improve the educational attainment of Native students.

To understand the importance of culturally relevant education is to know that Native people have the capacity to develop the policies and practices that align what happens in the classroom with what happens in the community. It is neither plausible nor reasonable to maintain schooling that perpetuates ill-conceived and irrelevant curriculum and pedagogy that alienates Native students. This misalignment undermines efforts by Native people to maintain community environments where everyone recognizes that every Native child is gifted and talented. A reasonable course of action for educational leaders to transform mainstream education is to create classroom environments that cultivate the unique skills and abilities of Native children that will contribute to the health and vitality of their communities. Unfortunately, this transformation continues to encounter resistance from school reform advocates.

School Reform

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), implemented under the 2002 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, drives most current
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school reform efforts. Critics of NCLB question its ability to address the diverse needs of our public school population. The debate regarding the federal government’s role in instituting an accountability system for states, school districts, and schools has been the focus of numerous academic publications (Darling-Hammond 2007; Fusarelli 2004; Kantor and Lowe 2006; Schoen and Fusarelli 2008). One of the primary points of contention in Indian Country is the practice of developing reforms that affect the educational attainment of Indian children without the input of Indigenous peoples. This is an example of paternalistic-oriented school reform veiled as an attempt to address the academic achievement of diverse student populations. Although we recognize the need to improve the academic achievement of Native students, we find it quite disturbing that these reforms fail to respect Native perspectives rather than supporting the active role and shared power of Indian families and communities. There are many examples of the positive impact of increasing collaborations between Native families, communities, and educational institutions discussed in this article. We know the importance of schools working in partnership with tribal communities to find ways to meaningfully involve Native parents in the education of their children. As educators and researchers, we have an ethical and professional responsibility to ask why more Native parents are not engaged and active in public schools serving Native students.

In addition to parent involvement, Boyer (2006) underscores the importance of tribal communities assuming an active role in defining educational reforms for Native education. This is a critical message for P–12 school leaders in the field of Indian education. As Boyer points out, collaboration is the key to establishing more cohesive relationships between home and school. To illustrate this point, Boyer provides an example of the work of a group of Native educators participating in the Rural Systemic Initiative (RSI) sponsored by the National Science Foundation. RSI was a transformational program geared to improving instructional delivery in the areas of math and science education for impoverished tribal communities. RSI recognized that Indigenous peoples understand the manner in which their children should be educated. As such, school reform must begin at the grassroots level and involve Native people as active participants from the initial developmental stages through program implementation and assessment. While key to successful reform efforts, Boyer also notes that collaborative initiatives with tribal communities and educators will inevitably encounter divergent perspectives. While difficult to deal with, it is important to remember that in the end, community members and educators hold the same core values of creating an education that is best for their students.

As Boyer’s example demonstrates, real reform requires innovation and attention to the cultural nuances of tribes and communities. The one-size-fits-all approach has not made significant progress in increasing Native educational

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achievement. The failure to consult Indigenous educational research in the formulation of federal mandates that affect American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children further undermines the educational attainment of this historically marginalized population. Despite decades of relevant research to delineate the educational needs of Native students, the federal government continues to enact school reform efforts without adequately garnering input on the potential impact to Native students. After a litany of governmental failures in Indian education, the best strategy for development and assessment of school reform is to examine existing Indigenous educational research. There is much to be learned from this research about the successful transformation of mainstream public schooling.

According to Fox (2000), educational research is vital in assessing the utility of standards-based reform in Indian education and promoting programmatic decisions necessary for ensuring Native students are equipped to meet the rigor of increased standards. This call to incorporate Indigenous educational research is certainly not restricted to classroom teachers. Fox also recommends that Indian parents gain the necessary knowledge base to actively participate in the school reform dialogue and decision-making process. Noley (1992) concurs that the role of Native parents is vital in transforming the landscape of mainstream education for their children. In order to take the lead in fostering the involvement of Native parents in their children’s education, P–12 teachers and school leaders must use Indigenous educational research to appropriately bridge the cultural gap that exists between tribal communities and mainstream school settings. Understanding the cultural frame of reference is essential to establishing partnerships with tribal communities.

It is also important to remember that real and lasting reform requires vigilance and patience. School reform is a long-term process, and there are no easy or quick fixes. An ongoing commitment from school leaders will be critical in developing and implementing policies and practices that recognize and value the perspectives of Native students, families, and communities. It will also be imperative for us to promote the voice of Native people in this reform process. This also requires school leaders to become informed about Native ways of knowing and doing and to recognize the value of these beliefs and practices in educating Native youth.

Ideological Beliefs and Practices

Ideological beliefs and practices associated with improving schooling for Native children should incorporate Indigenous perspectives. Those in power at the state and federal levels must learn the value of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom. There is also a need to know about and convey accurate portrayals
The failure to incorporate accurate portrayals of Indigenous cultures and traditions in mainstream education has perpetuated the stereotypes that exist in the dominant culture. The misrepresentation of American Indians and Alaska Natives in textbooks defines the dominant culture’s perceptions of Indigenous people. Unfortunately, Western research paradigms serve as the bedrock of much of our teacher and administrator education curricula. In many cases, this approach results in misinformed teacher or administrator candidates who, in turn, share an erroneous knowledge base regarding Ind-
The key to transforming these experiences is to recognize the critical role of Indigenous knowledge in preparing educators and school leaders who will work with Native students. The next step is to become educated about the real history of Native peoples in the United States. As previously noted, the NMAI is an excellent resource for beginning the journey toward more culturally appropriate teaching, learning, and leading. The NMAI, part of the Smithsonian Institution, is an Indigenous knowledge-based resource center open to the public. The museum also offers services targeted toward a wide range of educators. The many professional development opportunities and educational resources available through the museum can assist teachers and administrators in making mainstream education more culturally relevant for Native students.

At the core of transforming mainstream education for Native students are membership-based organizations, such as the NIEA. More than 3 decades ago, a group of Indian educators (Sparlin Norwood, Hershal “Ace” Shamant, Marigold Linton, Rosemary Christensen, John Winchester, Liz Whiteman, Dillon Platero, William Demmert, and Ned Hatathli) had the foresight to recognize the implications of sharing and exchanging Indigenous knowledge for the purpose of addressing issues in Indian education. Incorporated in 1970, today NIEA is the largest and oldest Indian education organization in the United States. Annual conferences provide a venue to share the Indigenous knowledge key to the transformational change necessary to improve educational attainment for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians (and by extension other Indigenous students) in mainstream education. Indian education conferences, meetings, and workshops provide essential professional development opportunities for exposure to Indigenous educational research relevant to the classrooms of Native and non-Native educators. Topics at these conferences range from workshops on digital storytelling to tips for fostering Indian parental involvement. NIEA also provides research-based resources with examples of best practices from Indian Country for Native and non-Native educators. For example, one publication supports incorporating Native languages as a component of culturally based education to increase the academic achievement and graduation rates of Native students (National Indian Education Association 2008).

From the national perspective, charting a course to transform education for Native students may seem an insurmountable task, but P–12 educators can indeed make a difference. Under the advisement of NIEA and a number of other authorities from the American Indian and Alaska Native community, the National Education Association provides the following list of recommendations for best practice steps for all P–12 educators:

- Model respect for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) cultures and languages. Incorporate Native culture and contributions into classroom projects, the
school curriculum, and after-school activities. When talking about the various ethnic and racial groups that compose the US population, always include American Indians and Alaska Natives, who are all too often left out of national statistics.

- **Hire American Indian and Alaska Native staff.** Many Native students feel isolated and invisible. They would benefit from the presence of Native educators who can serve as advocates and role models for students and as liaisons for Native families who feel uncomfortable navigating the school system.

- **Engage American Indian and Alaska Native parents and community members.** Schools that infuse Native culture into the school climate via the curricula, staff expertise, and school activities see a corresponding increase in the participation and interest level of Native families. Some schools have found that outreach efforts to Native parents and elders on the importance of student attendance result in improved attendance rates for AI/AN students.

- **Clarify academic expectations and be accessible to students.** For example, the National Education Association report mentions how student Mariah Bowers testified at a Senate hearing that the educators at her tribal school distributed a book to each student clearly describing academic standards and what kind of student products were required to achieve a proficient, emerging, or advanced grade.

- **Establish a holistic community school.** Tend to the physical and mental health issues, as well as academic needs, of students and their families. Provide access for after-school and weekend activities, such as parenting and computer classes (National Education Association 2010, 2–3).

Grounded in an Indigenous knowledge base, these recommendations can serve to guide P–12 educators, policy makers, and tribal community leaders in the decision-making process for transforming mainstream education to narrow the achievement gap between Indian children and their non-Native peers.

**Conclusion**

Swisher (1998) encourages Native scholars to conduct research and write in the field of Indian education. Similarly, Deloria (2004) asserts, “The current generation of educated Indians truly needs to be called the ‘New Indians’ because they represent the progress made in the last 30 years in bringing Indians into the mainstream of American intellectual thought” (17). The idea of Native scholars writing against the mainstream is a growing trend—supported by the application of Indigenous research methodologies guiding research agendas to support and sustain reform in Indian Country. This is not to suggest that research in tribal communities be limited to Native scholars.
However, it is necessary that there are contemporary contributions to the body of knowledge trying to improve the educational experiences of Indian students. Tippeconnic and Faircloth (2006) provide a model of this knowledge sharing in a collection of resources for P–12 educators to improve the teaching and learning of Native students in US schools. As school reformers call for a standardization of public school curricula and testing programs, Native scholars and practitioners must be included in these discussions to speak to the value of including Native traditions and perspectives.

Education Northwest, located in Portland, is a research-based organization dedicated to combining Western research methodologies and Indigenous knowledge to assist educational leaders in the development of evidence-based solutions for addressing the educational needs of Native students. One such resource available to P–12 school administrators was developed by a group of master American Indian and Alaskan Native educators. The resource, Learn-Ed Nations Inventory (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory 2002), serves as a self-assessment tool to determine whether mainstream schools are meeting the needs of Indigenous students. The dissemination of Indigenous-based research developed by Native scholars and practitioners will better position non-Native educators and school leaders for transforming Eurocentric classrooms to learning environments more culturally relevant to American Indian and Alaskan Native student populations.

Among other Indigenous educational resources developed and available through Education Northwest is the Indian Reading Series. This initiative was funded in 1972 by the National Institute of Education for use as a supplementary reading and language development program for Native and non-Native children. In a collaborative effort with 12 northwest Indian reservations, local Native authors and artists wrote a series of 140 culturally relevant stories over 11 years. Keeping with the protocol for Indigenous research practices, these materials were authenticated by the local tribal communities in the project and field tested with more than 1,200 Native and non-Native children. The complete series of books for grade levels 1–6, teacher’s manuals, and lesson plans are available free of charge on the Education Northwest website (http://educationnorthwest.org/). This organization is one of many (Edvantia, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, SEDL) incorporating Indigenous research to provide P–12 classroom teachers with culturally relevant and research-validated educational materials for instructing Native children and, in this case, materials for the instruction of non-Native children in authentic Indigenous culture.

As previously noted, to the detriment of many Native students, high-stakes testing has become the primary driver for educational decision making in the United States. As John Tippeconnic (2003) writes, “Opponents of testing argue that current testing programs do not provide valid or reliable information,
especially for English language learners, low socioeconomic status (SES) students, and ethnic and cultural groups” (3). This argument is particularly relevant for American Indian and Alaska Native students. Some would suggest that standardized, norm-referenced tests, such as achievement, aptitude, ability, and intelligence tests, have not provided an accurate reflection of the academic achievement of Indigenous students in mainstream education. Publications in Indigenous educational research underscore the inadequacies associated with standardized testing instruments, which fail to consider and incorporate tribal culture. For example, Bordeaux (1995) challenges the blatant disregard for the diversity of Native languages and cultures in the general application of standard testing instruments.

As Native researchers, we are obligated to recognize and honor the perspectives and traditions of Indigenous peoples. We must also employ our roles as Native scholars and researchers to use Indigenous knowledge to transform the landscape of contemporary education for the improvement of educational attainment in Indian Country. This holistic perspective of Indigenous educational research can drive the systemic and programmatic changes needed to decolonize mainstream education. Indigenous educational research is vital in the development of meaningful school reform efforts, crafting culturally responsive P–12 leadership programs, challenging nationwide curriculum and testing standards, and validating the ongoing fight to gain adequate resources for the education of our nation’s Native children and youth.

References

Guide for P–12 School Leaders


