"There's nothing not complicated about being Indian:"
American Indian student experiences in a mainstream middle school

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a qualitative case study of the experiences of American Indian students attending a mainstream middle school. Presented as a set of three independent, but closely related articles, this research offers insight into several different phenomena experienced by American Indian students. In the first article, I present my findings on how American Indian students experience the social and intellectual environment of school. In this study, I found that American Indian students must make choices—engage in behaviors that go against their cultural background in order to be successful, or continue to engage in their cultural behaviors and risk marginalization in the classroom. The second article addresses some of the tensions that exist in the call for more culturally responsive schooling by studying the curriculum and teacher pedagogy of an eighth grade social studies class. Following work on TribalCrit, I focus primarily on the ways in which the concepts of race, culture and colonialism are treated in the curriculum. I found that not only does the curriculum fail to address these concepts adequately, the current curriculum reinforces notions of colonialism and White supremacy, thereby normalizing Whiteness, and presenting any perspective outside Whiteness as the "Other." The third article is a reflection on the theoretical lenses researchers have historically used when studying American Indian education and the broader purpose(s) of conducting research in American Indian communities. This article advances the argument that to counter the educational debt incurred by American Indian students we need purposeful research in American Indian communities that demonstrates a commitment to methodologies and methods rooted in American Indian knowledge and praxis and theoretical approaches that align with American Indian philosophies and worldviews. When read together, these articles highlight elements

missing from the conversation on American Indian education research. Too often research with American Indian students occurs at tribally controlled schools, despite the fact that over 90% of American Indian students attend mainstream public schools. This study is my contribution to the goal of increasing equity in education for American Indian young people. My research suggests that while oppressive practices toward American Indians students continue to occur, educators have power to disrupt the practices that inhibit American Indian students from participating equally in the school environment.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

People enter the spaces they research in several ways. I started this dissertation as an attempt to address the questions I had about my own P-12 experiences as an American Indian student attending a mainstream school.[1] During my first site visit, I encountered a woman who curiously asked questions about my background. After we spoke for an hour, she finally asked—what did I plan to accomplish with my study? After I shared the goals of my research study, she said knowingly, "There is nothing *not* complicated about being Indian." Those words rang true for me, and as I discovered through interviews and observations, for the participants in my study. Through my research, I want others to recognize and understand how to best support American Indian students as they navigate mainstream education settings. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to understand and explain the American Indian student experience in a mainstream middle school, especially as it relates to the concept of "race."

This dissertation is a qualitative case study of the experiences of American Indian students attending a mainstream middle school. I organize my research into three individual articles. This introduction provides an overview of the project. I begin with a brief overview of the status of American Indian students in education, both historically and currently. Following this is an overview of my research objectives,

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[1] This is the term used in the literature and an explanation is forthcoming on page 9.

questions, overall study design, and the conceptual frames guiding my study. I conclude by providing a short explanation about each of the articles.

Brief History of American Indian Education

While American Indians inhabited this continent long before the arrival of Columbus, European colonization led to the development of policies and practices meant to exterminate or assimilate, and certainly to deculturalize the American Indian population (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). One cannot separate the educational experiences of American Indians from this history (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004; Spring, 2013).[2]

In order to situate educational policy toward American Indians within the larger discussion of governmental policies toward the American Indian population, I use Garrett's (1996) five stages of US government policy to outline my brief overview of American Indian educational history. Garrett divides American Indian history into five periods: the removal period (1600s to 1840s), the reservation period (1860 to 1920s), the reorganization period (1930s to 1950s), the termination period (1950s to 1960s), and the self-determination period (1973 to present).[3]

The removal period (1600s to 1840s) is characterized by the denial of citizenship rights and forced removal of American Indians from their tribal lands. As American Indian resistance increased, the United States government passed one of its most infamous acts—the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This act authorized President

[2] For a discussion about the historiography of the American Indian experience, see Blackhawk (2011).
[3] My main purpose for using Garrett's stages was his clear delineation in philosophies driving policy during those years. Although Garrett excludes certain years in his timeline (he does not give a reason), the periodization still offers a nice framework for providing a general overview of federal policy.

Andrew Jackson to relocate American Indians to land designated by the government.

The government justified this removal because American Indians did not use the land

in ways that aligned with White beliefs. The removal, later named the *Trail of Tears*,

led to the death of thousands of American Indians at the hand of disease, exposure,

contamination, and lack of preparedness for wilderness travel. Related, one of the most

damaging governmental actions involved education. Thomas McKenney, an early

architect of the common school movement, advanced the argument in 1818 that a

White missionary-led tribal school system would culturally transform American

Indians within one generation (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Since citizenship required the

denial of American Indian customs, religions, and practices, schools served as vehicles

to speed up the denial process. White colonizers (also known as "settlers") wanted

American Indians to speak English, adopt Christianity and leave their "heathen" ways

behind (Adams, 1995; Spring, 2013).

   The reservation period (1860s to 1920s) began the movement to assimilate

American Indian children. Viewing language as the most significant source of discord

between the American Indians and White colonizers, in 1867, the Indian Peace

Commission felt that it was imperative to teach American Indians English. Policy

emphasis included "replacing the use of native languages with English, destroying

Indian customs, and teaching allegiance to the US government" (Spring, 2013, p. 32).

In 1875, the process of forced schooling on off-reservation boarding schools began.

Boarding schools served to remove American Indian children from their families,

tribes, and by extension, their culture. Pratt (1892), who started the Carlisle Indian

School in 1879, notoriously voiced the intent of the school: "All the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (p. 46).[4]

The reorganization period (1930s to 1950s) began "the wholesale transfer of Indian students into public schools" (Grande, 2004, p. 15). Not only was this decision a cost-saving measure, but it also began the immersion process of American Indian students into public and mostly White schools. The release of *The Meriam Report,* a direct refutation of the current governmental approach toward education, sped up this transition process. The report found the current American Indian education system lacked any correlation between the curriculum and the realities of living on reservations (Glenn, 2011; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The conclusion of the report was to close off-reservation boarding schools and grant more freedom to tribal governments to manage their own affairs, particularly educational affairs (Adams, 1995; Glenn, 2011; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Despite this reversal in approach, the damage done by the federal government made rebuilding a difficult and challenging process.

The termination period (1950s-1960s) marked the dissolution of reservations and the movement of American Indians to urban centers. The dissolution of reservations meant American Indian education fell under local and state government control (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Seeing a strong disparity in American Indian education and the education of White students, the Senate released a report in 1969 titled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*. This report condemned previous government policies and made a series of recommendations to

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[4] For more on boarding schools please see Adams (1995), Churchill (2004), Eagle (2010), Hyer, (1990), Lomawaima (1994), and Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc (2006).

strengthen education for American Indians. Those included the establishment of American Indian-run education programs and the involvement of American Indians in developing educational programs in local schools. These educational programs included "early childhood education, vocational education, work-study, adult literacy education…and bilingual and bicultural education programs" (Spring, 2007, p. 120). "Terminating" their control over American Indian education affairs, the US government passed the 1972 Indian Education Act, which led to the development of the Office of Indian Education.

The final period Garrett references is the self-determination period (1973 to present). The passage of the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act granted tribes the authority to run their own education and health programs (first recommended in *The Meriam Report*). By 1988, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) operated 103 elementary and secondary schools, and funded 65 elementary and secondary schools operated by tribes or tribal organizations (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). In 1990, the US Department of Education convened the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force. The final task force report, released in 1991, argued that the public education system failed American Indian children on multiple levels. First, schools failed to nurture the intellectual development and academic performance of American Indian children. Evidence of this rested in high school dropout rates. In 1989, 36% of American Indian 10th graders did not complete high school (US Department of Education, 1991). Secondly, schools did not support the use of native languages in the classrooms. This was problematic because many American Indian students entering the

public education system came from home communities where they spoke traditional tribal languages and were unfamiliar with English. The political relationship between tribes and the federal government prevented educational growth since the fluctuating terms of sovereignty made it difficult for American Indian tribes to develop and support educational programs. Without education, American Indian students are "disempowered and disenfranchised" (US Department of Education, 1991).

Current Status of American Indian Education

In 2011, the US Department of Education released the most recent findings of the *National Indian Education Survey*, a large-scale survey of American Indian students in public schools. This study offers insight into current educational conditions for American Indian students in the public education system. Approximately 92% of American Indian eighth graders attend mainstream schools, 6% attend tribal schools, and 2% attend private schools. Of the 92% of students attending mainstream schools, 49% attend rural schools, and 66% have eligibility for the national school lunch program. Approximately 56% of American Indian students attend low-density mainstream schools where American Indian students represent less than 25% of the student population.

The NIES (2011) reports not only data on the standardized test scores of American Indian fourth and eighth graders, but also reports on student perceptions of their experiences in schools. According to the NIES, 57% of American Indian students attending low-density mainstream schools indicate they know little to nothing about important issues in American Indian communities. Only 20% of American Indian

students attending low-density mainstream schools report knowing a lot about American Indian heritage, and only 32% report knowing about American Indian history. The survey also indicates approximately 60% of American Indian students at low-density mainstream schools report never talking to a teacher about future plans, and 84% report speaking to a counselor only once about high school classes and future plans. Underrepresented at all levels of educational attainment, only 77% of American Indians over the age of 25 have a high school diploma, compared to 90% of non-Hispanic Whites. Additionally, only 13% of American Indians have a bachelor's degree, compared to 31% of non-Hispanic Whites. Only 67,200 American Indians hold advanced degrees (Office of Minority Health, 2012).

When comparing the academic performance of American Indian students to other groups of students, disparities are evident. For example, in 2011, American Indian students scored 19 points lower on the mathematics section of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than non-American Indian students. On the reading section of the NAEP, American Indian students performed 13 points below their non-American Indian peers. These scores are *lower* than in 2005 (they remained unchanged from 2009). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) indicated that "similar disparities are found on almost every measure of academic success (i.e. from standardized test scores to graduation rates to discipline referrals to postsecondary completion to the presence in special education and gifted and talented programs)" (p. 942). American Indian students consistently show patterns of academic underperformance yet the causes of this underperformance receive little attention

(Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Deloria, 2010; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995; Fryberg & Markus, 2007; Huffman, 2010; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Lomawaima, 2000; Sanders, 1987).

Fryberg and Markus (2007) attempt to explain the difference in the educational experiences of American Indian students and their White peers using a cultural model of education framework. Fryberg and Markus define "cultural model of education" as "the patterns of ideas and practices relevant to schools, teachers, and self that mediate and regulate behavior in the academic domain" (p. 213). They found that American Indian models of education diverged from the mainstream models:

> [American Indian students] were more likely to view education as a tool
> for individual *and* community success, to give negative associations to
> education and teachers, and to put family and community concerns
> ahead of academic concerns when the two domains were in conflict (p.
> 238).

This supports earlier research that found, starting with sixth grade, many American Indian students became withdrawn, sullen, resistant, and frustrated by their experiences in school (Sanders, 1987). Scholars link this to several aspects of the school experience including treatment by peers and school personnel, connection to the curriculum, and academic ability (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Huffman, 2010; Little Solider, 1985; Sanders, 1987).

Research Objectives and Questions

In their comprehensive review of research on American Indian education,

Deyhle and Swisher (1997) wrote:

> We started this chapter with voices that spoke of assimilation as the goal
>
> of Indian education. We end this chapter with the voices of Indian
>
> people who proposed a different goal, one that envisions equal
>
> coexistence and the maintenance of languages and cultures as effective
>
> means of achieving success in schools and communities. These Indian
>
> voices also call for an increase of both Indian researchers and
>
> perspectives (p. 176).

The objective of my research is to expand the conversation on the experiences of

American Indian students, particularly those attending K-12 mainstream schools, so

that we may develop better support systems in schools for American Indian students.

The literature on American Indian education applies the term "mainstream" to state

controlled schools to designate the difference between tribally controlled schools and

state controlled schools. This delineation is significant because it acknowledges that

tribally controlled schools operate as a function of the sovereign nation status held by

American Indian tribes in the U.S.[5]

There are three primary reasons why I consider this research necessary. First,

according to the 2011 NIES, 92% of American Indian students attend public schools,

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[5] In this dissertation, I use the term tribally controlled schools to refer to both tribally controlled schools
and Bureau of Indian Education controlled schools, however, a distinction between these two schools
does exist. For further reading on this distinction, please see Reyhner (1994) and Tippeconnic (2000).

6% attend tribal or Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) controlled schools, and 2%

attend some other type of schooling. Not only is there little K-12 research on the

experiences of American Indian students overall, the small body of literature that does

exist centers on the experiences of American Indian students attending tribal or BIE

schools (Deyhle, 1994; Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Hermes, 2007; Ingalls, Hammond,

Dupoux, & Baeza, 2006; Manuelito, 2005). Missing from current scholarship are

qualitative interpretations of the experiences of the 92% attending K-12 public schools.

Second, it is important to study the ways that racial consciousness emerges and

affects students in school environments. As Park (2011) notes, while some adults

believe that children are "color innocent" (p. 387)—that racial and ethnic differences

carry little meaning—children are not only familiar with the concept of race but base

their evaluation of people on their race. Educators can sometimes dismiss the salience

of racial identity, assuming that adolescents have an underdeveloped awareness of the

concepts of race and racism. This study illuminates the awareness American Indian

students have on the topic of race and how that awareness influences their experiences

in school.

Third, as more students from diverse backgrounds enter classrooms, teachers

must modify their teaching to accommodate the new learners. These types of

modifications require challenging teachers' sociocultural awareness, that "one's

worldview is not universal but is profoundly shaped by one's life experiences, as

mediated by a variety of factors, chief among them race/ethnicity…" (Villegas &

Lucas, 2002). However, without studies that ask diverse students about their

experiences, people can never learn where and how the system both benefits and fails these students. This study places American Indian students, a group rarely studied within this topic, at the center in order to uncover how American Indian students process and comprehend their classroom experiences.

Research Questions

The central question in my research is how American Indian students made meaning of their experiences at their middle school. My assumption was their identity as American Indian students influenced how they experienced their school environment. Several specific questions guided my inquiry into this experience:

- How do students make meaning of their racialized identities?

- How do students make meaning of their in-class interactions with teachers and other students?

- How do American Indian students experience the general school climate and social environment?

- In what ways do students make meaning of the curriculum?

- Does the curriculum stimulate the development of critical thinking about the concept of "race?"

- What do educators teach American Indian students about the concepts of "race" and culture?

When I initially developed these questions, my research site was unknown. After determining the site and meeting with school personnel, I decided to focus the

questions related to the curriculum and teaching on the eighth grade social studies classroom. I provide more detail in the section on the research site.

Dissertation Format

When I began this project, I assumed it would follow the traditional five-chapter format. However, once I collected data and started preliminary analysis, what emerged was a compelling case study of a group of American Indian eighth grade students navigating a mainstream middle school environment. To examine best their experiences, I decided to complete three separate analyses, which drew from the same empirical data source—the time I spent in the middle school. Approaching the dissertation in this format offers multiple perspectives on the topic of American Indian students' experiences in mainstream middle schools. While each article draws from the same conceptual frameworks, the articles serve as standalone pieces complete with their own theoretical frameworks, research questions, and methods of analysis.

Overall Study Design

In the 2011-2012 school year, I conducted a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2009) in Leaf Lake Middle School (all names of people and places are pseudonyms). I spent three months at the site, using ethnographic research methods (Esterberg, 2002) to understand the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream schools. After meeting with the superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and community elders (parents) it made the most sense to research eighth grade students and limit my study to one specific grade and one specific classroom. According to school data, the eighth grade contained the greatest number of American

Indian students. Community elders felt the eighth grade students would enjoy participating in this opportunity. Based on my own interest in social studies curriculum and the veteran status of the eighth grade social studies teacher, I agreed to conduct in-depth observations in the social studies classroom.

Recruiting participants presented several challenges. While I secured permission from the appropriate school officials to conduct my study in the middle school, federal regulation prevented the school from sharing racial demographic information. In order to gain participants, I worked closely with community gatekeepers (school administrators, teachers, and parents) to introduce myself to students eligible to participate. I also presented my research to each social studies class period and solicited volunteers through that approach. Once students expressed interest in participating, I worked with their families to secure permission.

I observed the eighth grade social studies classroom, all school assemblies, movement during class change time, and informal conversations between students during free time (before class started). I was on-site for three to four days a week for 10 weeks, observing for approximately 245 hours. I also conducted one-on-one semi-formal interviews with the student participants, classroom teacher, school principal, and the American Indian assistance staff person. Given my study occurred in a social studies classroom, I analyzed the written curriculum (textbooks, workbooks), teacher lessons, and teacher comments. Throughout my study, I took field notes and audio recorded at certain times (during interviews and classroom lessons). I also completed all of the in-class and homework assignments while I conducted my research. I found

that doing the lessons at the same time as the students gave me perspective on the topics and material they engaged with related to the curriculum. I transcribed all interviews and provided participants the opportunity to "member-check" my findings and initial analysis.

While my overall study design was a qualitative case study, phenomenology (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994) and content analysis (Hogben & Waterman, 1997; Hong, 2009; Macgillivay & Jennings, 2008; Wade, 1993) emerged as methodological frames to help me understand the data. I describe these methodologies in depth in the corresponding articles. However, here I do give more information about the community and school, which offers insight into the experiences of my participants.

Research Site: Leaf Lake Middle School

Leaf Lake School District is located in a town of approximately 5,000 people in a Midwestern state. It is a rural community located near the Leaf Lake American Indian reservation. The reservation enrolls 1,300 members, with 800 members living on the reservation. The 2010 United States Census reports that 80% of the Leaf Lake population identifies as White, 10% identifies as "Other," 6% identifies as American Indian, 5% identifies as bi- or multiracial, and less than 1% identifies as either African-American or Asian. The median household income of the entire population of Leaf Lake is $35,531 (no data exists for American Indians specifically). About 12% of the population lives below the federal poverty line. Leaf Lake is home to three schools—Leaf Lake Elementary School, Leaf Lake Middle School, and Leaf Lake High School.

At the time of my study, 305 students enrolled at Leaf Lake Middle School, with 92 students in the eighth-grade. Within the eighth-grade population, 10 students identified as American Indian.

Located on the Leaf Lake Indian Reservation is the Leaf Lake Tribal School. According to the school personnel I interviewed, interesting tensions existed between the Leaf Lake School District and the Leaf Lake Tribal School. Enrollment policies allow American Indian students to move freely between schools and this commonly occurs within any given year. The participants in my study attended school in the Leaf Lake School District since first grade. While they attended preschool and kindergarten at Leaf Lake Tribal School, their families felt Leaf Lake School District schools provided better educational opportunities than Leaf Lake Tribal School. An initial challenge in gaining access to the families of my participants was the fear that my study sought to diminish the education at Leaf Lake Middle School in favor of the education provided at Leaf Lake Tribal. School choice is a complicated issue for most families; the families of my participants were adamant in their belief that Leaf Lake Middle School was a better, more appropriate environment for their children. When asked why, the most information I received related to academic level—Leaf Lake Tribal School was two years behind Leaf Lake Middle School.

Leaf Lake Middle School is a large building, located in the middle of Leaf Lake. Formerly Leaf Lake High school, it feels antiquated. The classrooms do not have air conditioning, the posters on the wall are decayed and yellowed, and very little updated technology exists in the classrooms. Despite the close proximity to the Leaf

Lake Indian reservation, the school does not include many posters or other visual pieces of art that include American Indian people. The only artifact I saw existed in the library and it was a map of American Indian tribes in the U.S. (and was decades old).

I spent a majority of my fieldwork in the eighth grade social studies classroom. No state-mandated curriculum existed at the time of my study, so teachers were free to choose their own curriculum. The curriculum for the eighth grade social studies class was world geography. The sixth and seventh grade curriculum also emphasizes world geography concepts, although the focus narrows on certain areas of the world. In addition to the world geography text, the teacher created two workbooks for students to use throughout the course. The teacher adhered to a very loose course outline, choosing toward the end of my observation period to emphasize lessons on the relationship between the United States and other countries. While world geography is an important component of social studies curriculum, analyzing the curriculum to reflect issues relevant to my participants presented some challenges. I address these challenges more fully in the second article on the curriculum experiences of my participants.

The classroom arrangement had all of the desks face the front of the room. The teacher had two desks, one behind the desks, and one facing the desks. I counted approximately 40 posters on athletics, geography, and motivation throughout the room. Only two posters featured non-White people (a poster of Martin Luther King, Jr. and one of Mahatma Gandhi). None of the posters included any American Indian representation. In addition to the posters, the front of the room contained two large,

world maps. Student-drawn country flags hung from the ceiling. According to the teacher, students had assigned seats, which he changed periodically.

Participants

Overall, my study consisted of eight participants, five students and three school personnel. The five eighth-grade students were Melita, Gertie, Lara, Freddie, and Grace. The three school personnel were Matt Longley, Principal of Leaf Lake Middle School; John Hanson, 8th Grade Social Studies Teacher; and Seth Ravenwood, the Education Aide. Seth is the only member of the school personnel who identified as American Indian. I provide brief biographies of each participant below. I base these biographies on information collected during our interviews.

Melita—Melita lives in Ashton, a community next to the Leaf Lake community. She lives with her mother, her father, and her two brothers. Melita identifies as half-American Indian and half-Hispanic, although says she aligns mostly with her American Indian culture. She also has two dogs she considers to be like family. In her free time, she likes to draw, play basketball, and play with her dogs. She plans to attend college and wants to study graphic design. She plans to be a graphic designer because she likes drawing and could turn her drawings into something other people besides herself could enjoy.

Gertie—Gertie lives in the Leaf Lake community with her father, stepmother, five sisters, and three brothers. She identifies as American Indian and Hispanic. Gertie participates in band, and volunteers in the community with Girl Scouts. She wants to

attend college because it provides a good job for the future. She thinks she might want to be a nurse, a dental hygienist, or a dentist.

Lara—Lara lives on the Leaf Lake Indian Reservation with her grandmother, brother, aunt and uncle, and two cousins. Lara identifies as American Indian. She enjoys spending time with her family and traveling to powwows. She plays volleyball, basketball, and runs track at Leaf Lake Middle School. She wants to attend a tribal college because it offers more support for American Indians. When she grows up, she wants to be an author or a lawyer.

Freddy—Freddy lives on Leaf Lake Indian Reservation with his father, mother, and two sisters. Freddy identifies as American Indian. He has a large extended family, which also live on the reservation. Freddy likes to spend his time making origami or drawing pictures. Freddy wants to attend college.

Grace—Grace lives on Leaf Lake Indian Reservation with her grandmother, who adopted her several years ago. Grace identifies as American Indian. In her free time, she takes walks with her little brother. She also plays basketball for Leaf Lake Middle School and is interested in playing basketball in high school. She plans to attend college to make her grandmother, or at least someone, proud. She is interested in being a film director but does not know just yet, as there are many choices for future jobs.

Matt Longley—Matt is the principal of Leaf Lake Middle School. Matt identifies as White. He grew up in the same Midwestern state as Leaf Lake and attended a small, private college. After college, he taught high school mathematics for

nine years in a predominately-White neighboring community of Leaf Lake. During this time, he received his master's degree in educational leadership. In 2010, he interviewed for the middle school principal position and received it. Matt found the position at Leaf Lake intriguing because he did not have much experience working with non-White student populations.

John Hanson—John is the eighth grade social studies teacher at Leaf Lake Middle School. John identifies as White. He grew up in an urban city, located about 300 miles from Leaf Lake. John attended college in the same state as Leaf Lake, where he met his wife. After teaching at-risk students in different states, he applied for the social studies position at Leaf Lake Middle School and received it. He lives in Leaf Lake with his family and is a well-known and respected athletic coach. He also has his master's degree in geography education.

Mr. Hanson is beloved by his students. Voted "best teacher" in the middle school for three years in a row, it was obvious that students thought highly of him. Other teachers respected Mr. Hanson, as they routinely sought his feedback and advice about classroom issues. At the same time, the school administration viewed Mr. Hanson as a renegade in that he did what he wanted in his classroom with little regard for what others wanted

Seth Ravenwood—Seth is the education aide at Leaf Lake Middle School. He identifies as American Indian and lives on the Leaf Lake Indian reservation. Seth started working at Leaf Lake after a series of jobs in manufacturing and technical jobs. As the education aide, he serves the American Indian students by assisting them during

class. Seth considers his position undefined—therefore he feels his biggest responsibility is making sure American Indian students recognize him as an advocate for them in the school system.

Conceptual Frames

In order to make meaning of the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream schools, I draw on three ideas. The first idea emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT): analyzing the experiences of racialized people in education settings requires challenging claims of colorblindness.[6] The second idea emerges from Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit): racism and colonialism are endemic to society and therefore American Indian positionality as both a racialized and colonized individual in the US must be central to any evaluation of the experiences of American Indians. The third idea also emerges from TribalCrit: critical to the American Indian education experience is the rejection of assimilation and acculturation philosophies present in current research paradigms in American Indian education.[7] I bring these together to speak to not only the experience of racialized students in schools, but also how American Indians students occupy a unique space from other racialized students.

Critical Race Theory and the Colorblind Perspective

Analyzing inequity in education requires "challenging claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) present

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[6] The use of the term "blindness" to refer to ideologies that do not "see" certain perspectives privileges ablebodiedness. I recognize the problematic usage of this term. However, "colorblind" and "colonial blind" occur commonly in the literature, and in effort to reflect current literature, I use these terms.

[7] Calls for an end to assimilation in schools occurred prior to Brayboy; however, TribalCrit explicitly rejects all forms of assimilation, including the "integration" of American Indian students into public schools, which he argues, serves to replace Indigenous knowledge with "academic knowledge."

in current discourse on race and education in the U.S. Students sometimes struggle in their understanding of race because most students adhere to the "color-blind" ideology. This is the belief that all one must do is "treat everyone the same" and school inequity will disappear. They understand oppression only on the individual/interpersonal level without understanding the larger institutional and social/cultural levels (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Even when teachers think their actions are "color-blind," research indicates their behaviors and practices demonstrate recognition of racialization (Schofield, 2007; Yoon, 2012; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). Acting "color-blind" ignores the reality of minoritized students' experiences (Schofield, 2007). Others are willing to acknowledge racism but only as individual acts committed by racists—not as practice woven through the development of our society. Using CRT allows for interrogation of current schooling practices. In my research, I do not intend to permit "the hegemonic rule of the oppressor" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) but rather expose the existence of the oppressor/oppressed relationship present in education.

The Intersection of Colonialism and Racism

Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) emerged from CRT as a way to theorize the experiences of American Indians as both a racialized and colonized population in the United States. While a global acknowledgment of the relationship between colonization and racism exists, current laws in the U.S. position American Indians as only racialized people and not colonized people. Richardson (2012) uses the terms "structural inclusion" and "political alienation" to describe this tension.

TribalCrit roots itself in "the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). TribalCrit moves away from the White/Black binary CRT originally constructed by adding colonialism into the conversation.

Critical to understanding the experience of American Indians in the U.S. is the recognition that colonization is endemic to society, while still acknowledging the role of racism. A primary difference between the relationship of American Indians and the federal government as compared to other ethnic and racial groups is that "from the beginning the relationship was a political one, steeped in diplomacy and treaties" (Wilkins & Stark, 2011, p. 39). Grande (2004) writes

> American Indians are not like other subjugated groups struggling to
> define their place within the larger democratic project. Specifically, they
> do not seek greater "inclusion"; rather, they are engaged in perpetual
> struggle to have their legal and moral claims to sovereignty recognized
> (p. 107).

The relationship American Indian tribes have with the U.S. government is complicated. The nation-state status of American Indians is not universal and individual tribes negotiate their own sovereign status independent of other tribes. While Grande and Brayboy emphasize the importance of recognizing this in the American Indian education experience, racialization still plays a very powerful role. TribalCrit raises this tension between using race as a primary lens of analysis and sovereignty as a

primary lens of analysis. It is not clear how to reconcile this, but this dissertation uses TribalCrit to think through this tension.

Education through Assimilation and Acculturation

Policies toward American Indians students historically represented the belief that American Indian students' success depended on their ability to assimilate to the majority culture. Historically, most of the research conducted on American Indian students fell into the following categories: intelligence and achievement testing, urban migration, teachers, parents, cultural deprivation, language barriers, schools, and student persistence (Berry, 1968; Noley; 1981; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). A quick review of the foundational research in those categories shows the usage of four different theoretical perspectives: cultural discontinuity theory (Au, 1993; Ledlow, 1992; St. Germaine, 1995), structural inequality theory (Au, 1993; Huffman, 2008; Ogbu & Simons, 1998), interactionalist theory (Huffman, 2010; Tinto, 1982), and transculturation theory (Hallowell, 1972; Huffman, 2008). The two most commonly used are cultural discontinuity theory and interactionalist theory. While these theories offer frames for understanding the experiences of American Indian students, they do not acknowledge the influence of colonialism on education nor do these frameworks provide the tools needed to dismantle the dominant ideologies of colonialism and racism in schools.

For instance, two of these theories reflect the deficit model paradigm (Valencia, 2010), supporting assimilation and/or acculturation as the "best" way for American Indian students to succeed in education. The use of cultural discontinuity theory aligns

most closely with this paradigm. It argues that the reason American Indian students do poorly in school (compared to White peers) is due to the mismatch between the cultural heritage of American Indian students and the White-dominated culture of school. Despite the lack of empirical evidence to support this theory, it continues to persist in the conversation on American Indian education. Interactionalist theory argues that student success depends on the ability of students to integrate both academically and socially. Integration occurs when students accept the norms, behaviors, and attitudes of their school setting and commit themselves to supporting (and sometimes replicating) those norms, behaviors, and attitudes. Interactionalist theory links American Indian student success to their ability to participate in the dominant White community. In many ways, "integration" is code for "assimilation." Given the reliance of current research on American Indian to use these frames, I challenge their relevant application in evaluating the American Indian student experience.

Perspectives on Terminology and Race

Given the dynamic and powerful nature of identity, it is important that I make clear my position on both language and the concept of "race." There is tremendous power in the language and terminology we use to describe individuals and their experiences. As with any colonized and minoritized group, the most commonly used descriptors often reflect the views of the colonizers and not those colonized (Yellow Bird, 1999). Given this, I find it necessary to provide an overview of terminology and its uses in this dissertation.

Most people use the following terms interchangeably: "tribal nations," "American Indians," "Native Americans," "indigenous people," and "First Nations people" (Fleming, 2006; Wilkins, 2011). Of all the terms used, "American Indian" is most problematic given its geographical inaccuracy and overgeneralization of the cultural diversity present in indigenous communities (Wilkins, 2011). While most people regard Indigenous people as a single racialized group, they represent over 560 distinct tribes and villages (Yellow Bird, 1998). Despite the popularity of the phrase "Native American," using this term creates more confusion given its universal application to anyone born in the Americas (Wilkins, 2011). The term "First Nations" addresses some of this confusion, but it is the more popular choice in Canada rather than in the United States.

I recognize there is no universally acceptable term by all indigenous people in North America and, therefore, I do not attempt to claim that certain phrases are better. When referring to my personal experiences, I use the term "American Indian" as it reflects my familial and tribal heritage. In writing my dissertation, I chose American Indian given its common usage in the literature. The terminology used when discussing specific scholarship reflects those specific authors and their designations. Likewise, I respected the choices made by the participants regarding terminology related to their personal identification.

Given that my study focuses on the racialized identities of students, I also want to clarify my position on the concept of "race." It is widely accepted that race is a socially constructed phenomenon that has no biological basis (Cameron & Wycoff,

1998; Obach, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1986). Roberts (2012) writes, "Race is not a biological category that is politically charged. It is a political category that has been disguised as a biological one" (p. 4). This categorization has long-lasting and permanent consequences on people. By conducting this study, I do not intend to legitimize the belief that biological race exists. It is my intention to offer greater insight into how students (who grew up surrounded and immersed in the phenomenon of "race") experience the phenomenon of "race" and how racialization influences their school contexts.[8]

Situating My Identity

Before introducing the articles, it is important that I situate my identity within the research. As a member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, I identify as an American Indian. Therefore, when designing and implementing my study I paid careful attention to the notion of "insider/outsider" research. Merton (1972) first identified the "Insider Doctrine" which indicates that members of a particular group should research their own group. Critics of the "Insider Doctrine" argue this type of research leads to bias due to over-rapport, which occurs when the researcher closely identifies with the perspectives of the participants and fails to approach the research in a critical manner (Innes, 2009). Additionally, insiders may overlook or take for granted certain assumptions about the particular research group due to their identification with that group (Hayano, 1979). On the other hand, individuals conducting outsider research see themselves as better equipped to use objectivity in their research—they have no

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[8] For more on discussions about the concept of "race" see Brodkin (1995), Cameron & Wycoff (1998), Graves (2004), Omi & Winant (1993), and Roberts (2012)

close connection to the research group. This lack of familiarity means outsider researchers raise questions that insiders never think to ask (Merton, 1972).

Several insider researchers find that while conducting insider research presents challenges, those challenges do not weaken their research. Deyhle and Brayboy (2000) state, "From our own experience, it is the *lack* of distance that has enhanced our own research" (p. 165). In particular, American Indian scholars favor the idea that American Indian scholars conduct research in American Indian communities. Swisher (1998) writes:

> How can an outsider really understand life on reservations, the struggle
> for recognition, sovereignty, economic development, preservation of
> language and culture? Perhaps they can gain a high degree of empathy
> and act as "brokers" of sorts, but it takes the depth of meaning
> incorporated in Indian education to ask appropriate questions and find
> appropriate answers (p. 192).

However, being a member of a researched group does not automatically confer insider status (Gilbert, 1994). Other factors such as age, class, gender, education, ethnicity, race, culture, and physical appearance can prevent insider researchers from obtaining the trust and credibility needed to access the research participants.

In many ways, I am both an insider/outsider to my study. I was mostly unaware of racial identity in elementary and middle school, and felt uncomfortable claiming that aspect until I was in college. For my participants, their racial identity held a great deal of salience in their elementary and middle school years and they fully claimed their

identity as American Indians. However, my experiences in mainstream schools

mirrored their experience, something we connected over during our interviews. I was

also careful not to infuse my own experiences on theirs. This balancing act as an

insider/outsider researcher ultimately benefitted my study. Recognition of this dynamic

required me to make thoughtful, careful decisions about the research process including

how I engaged with participants, how I analyzed the data, and ultimately, how I

represent this research publicly.

Entering the Study

As stated before, once I started analyzing the data, I determined my study

involved multiple perspectives. These multiple perspectives, while closely related,

offer insight into several different phenomena experienced by my student participants.

The first two articles are empirical analyses of the experiences of American Indian

students in mainstream middle schools. In the first article, I present my findings on

how American Indian students experience the social and intellectual environment of

school. In this study, I found that American Indian students must make choices—

engage in behaviors that go against their cultural background in order to be successful,

or continue to engage in their cultural behaviors and risk marginalization in the

classroom. I also found that influencing these choices was their understanding of the

concepts of race, racism, knowledge, and power.

In the second article, I address some of the tensions that exist in the call for

more culturally responsive schooling by studying the curriculum and teacher pedagogy

of an eighth grade social studies class. Following work on TribalCrit, I focus primarily

on the ways in which the concepts of race, culture and colonialism are treated in the curriculum. I found that not only does the curriculum fail to address these concepts adequately, the current curriculum reinforces notions of colonialism and White supremacy, thereby normalizing Whiteness, and presenting any perspective outside Whiteness as the "Other."

The third article is a reflection on the theoretical lenses researchers have historically used when studying American Indian education and the broader purpose(s) of conducting research in American Indian communities. This article advances the argument that to counter the educational debt incurred by American Indian students we need purposeful research in American Indian communities that demonstrates a commitment to methodologies and methods rooted in American Indian knowledge and praxis and theoretical approaches that align with American Indian philosophies and worldviews.

When read together, these articles highlight elements missing from the conversation on American Indian education research. Too often research with American Indian students occurs at tribally controlled schools, despite the fact that over 90% of American Indian students attend mainstream public schools. This study is my contribution to the goal of increasing equity in education for American Indian young people. My research suggests that while oppressive practices toward American Indians students continue to occur, educators have power to disrupt the practices that inhibit American Indian students from participating equally in the school environment. It is time for schools to stop "killing the Indian"—our students deserve better.

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CHAPTER 2: PUTTING YOUR GAME FACE ON: BEING AMERICAN

INDIAN AT SCHOOL

A paper to be submitted to *Teachers College Record*

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Student engagement in schools occurs at the intersection of student identities

formed in the social world outside of schooling and the social world of schools

themselves (Faircloth, 2012). For students who identify as American Indian, this

intersection represents a tension that exists between their racialized identity and their

experiences in mainstream schools.[9] This tension affects American Indian students'

social, emotional, and intellectual engagement with school. If we are to support

American Indian students in mainstream schools, we need to better understand this

tension. While there is a small body of literature centered on the experiences of

American Indian students attending tribal or Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools

(Deyhle, 1994; Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Hermes, 2007; Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux

& Baeza, 2006; Manuelito, 2005), missing from current scholarship is qualitative

interpretations of the experiences of the 92% attending K-12 public schools (National

Indian Education Study, 2011).

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative case study on American Indian

students who attend mainstream schools and how they experience the social and

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[9] The literature on American Indian education applies the term "mainstream" to state controlled schools to designate the difference between tribally controlled schools and state controlled schools. This delineation is significant because it acknowledges that tribally controlled schools operate as a function of the sovereign nation status held by American Indian tribes in the U.S. While I use tribally controlled schools to refer to both tribally controlled schools and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, a distinction exists between them. For further information, please see Reyhner (1994) and Tippeconnic (2000).

intellectual environment of school. In my research, I look at three different elements of their experiences. First, I looked at how students made meaning of their American Indian identity in their school space. Second, I examined how students made meaning of their interactions with teachers and other students. Third, I analyzed the treatment of race and racism in the school environment.

Schools are central to the identity development and formation of young people, including racial identity development (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Kaplan & Flum, 2009), and ample scholarship exists which support this key link between identity and educational outcomes (Delpit, 1995; Erikson, 1968; Gee, 2000; Kaplan & Flum, 2009; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This particular study looks at the experience of American Indian students in middle school, a significant moment in the racial and academic identity formation of American Indian youth. According to Sanders (1987), beginning in middle school (sixth through eighth grade), many American Indian students start to withdraw and, become sullen, resistant, and frustrated by their experiences in mainstream schools. Scholars link this to several aspects of the scholastic experience, including treatment by peers and school personnel, lack of meaningful connection to the curriculum, and perception of academic ability (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Huffman 2010; Little Soldier, 1985; Sanders, 1987). Many American Indian students feel disconnected from the culture of mainstream schools (Sanders, 1987). For students who identify as non-White, "race and ethnicity are often central themes to identity and create differential challenges and opportunities" (Akos & Ellis, p. 26, 2008). Lack of awareness and inclusion of the needs of American Indian students in schools by peers,

teachers, and school personnel often alienates students, who in turn withdraw from their educational experience (Garrett, 1996; Sanders, 1987).

Literature Review

In order to help make sense of the phenomenon of "being" American Indian in a mainstream middle school, I looked at several different sets of literature. Included in this literature review are research themes explicating the cultural differences between American Indian and White adolescents, as well as identities-in-practice, and the experience of "race" and "racism" in schools. Together, these themes provided insight into how my participants made meaning of the totality of their experiences in their middle school.

Cultural Differences

There are over 560 recognized tribes in the U.S. American Indians represent a very diverse and culturally nuanced community. While not every American Indian espouses or practices all the values attributed to American Indians in education settings, there are some values with universal application. Sanders (1987) argues, "although each tribe is different because of tribal structure and geography, there are prevailing basic, consistent values and attitudes held by American Indians that transcend and cut across tribes as well as across reservations and urban areas" (p. 82). One such value is the desire to not assimilate or acculturate into the mainstream culture of non-American Indians. Schools are important in this context because historically schools served as the main vehicle for assimilation and acculturation (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004; Spring, 2013). As Little Solider (1985) states, "Education is an

institution within society and thus an instrument of that society, with the schools

reflecting prevailing values and attitudes" (p. 185). Mainstream schools then, reflect

the values of White students.

Combining the efforts of Sanders (1985) and Deyhle (1994), Table 1 represents

the differences in cultural values and expectations between American Indian and White

American students.[10]

Table 1: Sanders (1985) and Deyhle's (1994) Difference in Values

American Indian	White American
Speaks softly and slowly	Speaks loudly and faster
Avoids speaking	Addresses listener directly, by name
Injects less	Interrupts frequently
Uses less encouraging body language	Uses verbal encouragement
Delayed responses	Immediate responses
Cooperation	Competition
Group needs over individual needs	Personal goals considered important
Encourages sharing	Encourages saving and individual ownership
Participation after observation	Trial and error learning
Privacy and noninterference valued	Need to control and affect others
Self-discipline in both body and mind	Self-expression and self-disclosure
Emotional relationships valued	Concerned mostly with facts
Patience	Aggressive

American Indian values center on collaboration and collectiveness (Little Soldier,

1985; Sanders, 1987). Problem solving requires a community-based approach. When

American Indian students have trouble, their support networks attempt to solve the

problem collectively (LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990; Sanders, 1987). There is

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[10] I recognize these values essentialize both White students and American Indian students. While not all White or American Indian students exhibit these particular values, schools are structured in ways that reward White values over American Indian values (regardless of how essentialized they are). During my conversations with school administrators, White values were routinely described as "important" for school success.

an extended family orientation, with strong kinship relationships. American Indian students are not rewarded for curiosity at home because the expectation is that young people gain knowledge from their elders. Students then avoid answering teacher questions and do not volunteer as a sign of respect. However, White teachers treat this behavior as passive or laziness.

Comparing White students to American Indian peers, Begay and Begay (1982) found significant differences in the way that White adults and American Indian adults perceived youth between the ages of nine and fifteen. While American Indians felt that young people became adults at puberty, White adults held that young people did not become adults until they turned eighteen. White adults also indicated that between the ages of nine and fifteen, young people lacked the ability to make decisions, had little self-efficacy, and should defer to adults in most matters (Begay & Begay, 1982). American Indian adults, on the other hand, indicated that between the ages of nine and fifteen children must learn the consequences of decision-making, acquire an understanding of their own best interests, and defer more to individual choice over that of the family (Begay & Begay, 1982). Recognizing the disparity in these child role expectations problematizes the current structure of mainstream public schools. If schools design educational experiences to match only the cultural expectations of White students, these "frameworks may put other adolescents from other cultures at risk" (Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994, p. 157). American Indian young people, who at home are treated as adults, may find the rules and expectations of school stifling and restrictive. The disparity between these cultural expectations may lead to

miscommunication and mischaracterization, as is often the case for White parents and teachers, who commonly and mistakenly label the noninterference of American Indian families as "uncaring" or "uneducated" (Deyhle & LeCompte). This cultural divide, and the ignorance of that divide displayed by the current public school structure, negatively influences the American Indian student's experience in mainstream schools.

Identities-in-Practice

Individuals do not experience their identities in isolation: a person's racialized identity intersects with the social sphere in which that person is located at any given point in time. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) articulates the importance of this intersection. Bronfenbrenner argues that the different contexts people experience (e.g. home, work, school, family, community, culture) influence their identity. Correspondingly, how individuals present or "practice" their identity within these contexts may differ depending on a variety of factors such as level of safety, relationship to others in the environment, and general feelings of acceptance (Faircloth, 2012). Within classrooms and schools, students often negotiate membership in different groups as it relates to their identities, and so students might act a certain way with their American Indian peers, yet act much differently with their White peers. Students may choose to discuss their identity in the classroom or withhold that information from the teacher. Students draw from their personal knowledge related to their identity in order to navigate school environments.[11]

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[11] Studying the experiences of American Indian students raised the question of whether to draw from the school experiences of other racialized groups. On one hand, it makes sense since racialized students encounter similar barriers in school environments (low academic expectations, lack of cultural

According to Fryberg and Markus (2007), "As individual learners enter the classroom, they bring with them a framework of meanings that reflect their social and developmental experiences" (p. 215). In several studies, researchers argued that youths encounter two sets of systems in school that require navigation (Rigsby & McDill, 1975; Brown, Mory, & McKinney, 1994). The first is the system of adult norms and values. This includes the expectations and attitudes of school personnel such as administrators and teachers. For example, teachers may believe raising hands to respond to a question is "normal" and demonstrates commitment to education. The second system involves peer norms and values. This includes the ways in which peers let fellow students know that they "fit" or "belong" within the school community. However, the norms and values from both systems often represent White cultural and behavioral models of what constitutes "appropriate behavior." For American Indian students who are unfamiliar with these norms and values, it becomes challenging to navigate the system of school. Given the nature of schools to legitimize certain identities over others, American Indian students may find themselves unable to practice their identities without fear of drawing attention to themselves (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). This type of positioning can limit or discourage their engagement with learning.

Concepts of "Race" and Racism" in Education

The concept of "race" is a socially constructed phenomenon in the United States (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1986; Obach, 1999). Roberts (2012)

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inclusion). On the other hand, if you take the position that American Indian students are first colonized and then racialized it presents a different perspective. I plan to explore this further.

states, "Race is not a biological category that is politically charged. It is a political category that has been disguised as a biological one" (p. 4). The initial construction of racial categories served as a sorting mechanism used by dominant groups to exert, maintain, and extend social and economic power over others (Brodkin, 1994; Spickard, 1992). Within the school system, the continued use of federally created racial definitions in policies, procedures, forms and data collection further institutionalizes these socially constructed categories (Knaus, 2006). Brodkin (1994) refers to this concept as "racial assignment." Within schools, individuals can choose their racial identity when filling out school forms, but people within the school may give students "racial assignments" based on their physical appearance, name, or home community that do not align with the student's chosen identity. For example, a student who identifies on school forms as American Indian but has blond hair and blue eyes might receive the racial assignment of "White" by their teachers and peers.

Individuals identifying as "American Indian" hold a unique position within the conversation on the social construction of race in the U.S. because, by definition, American Indians are both a racialized people and a colonized people. According to *Directive No. 15, Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting*, American Indians are people with "origins in any of the original peoples of North America, and who maintain cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition" (Office of Management and Budget, 1997). When Europeans invaded and subsequently settled in the territory that is now called the United States of America, over six hundred independent tribes lived on that land. After claiming

ownership of that land, the U.S. government eventually negotiated treaties with tribal governments, something not done with any other resident American group. This created dual relationships for American Indians who are considered both citizen and non-citizen under U.S. law. This unique relationship between cultural distinctiveness and political sovereignty influenced the European perceptions held of American Indians by people of European heritage (Wilkins & Stark, 2011). The biggest perception was of American Indians as "uncivilized" and "savages."

The U.S. government altered the legal and political status of American Indian tribes as sovereign nations based on those perceptions. Despite the "unique and legal political relationship" between tribes and the U.S. government, several government policies require conformity to the concept of "race." The two most significant policies relevant to education are tribal enrollment and proof of blood quantum. In order to receive any federal funding or benefits, individuals claiming their identity as "American Indian" must show proof of enrollment within their tribe. Public schools have access to funding for American Indian support positions, but schools must show a certain percentage of enrolled tribal students. Enrolling in tribes requires blood quantum proof. "Blood quantum" is the process in which your tribe certifies "how much" American Indian blood you have based on your genealogical history. Individuals must prove they are a quarter American Indian in order to receive recognition as an American Indian in the US. The lack of accurate records significantly undermines this process, yet blood quantum remains one of the most important criteria

used by the federal government and tribes to determine legal identity status (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Smedley, 1998; Wilkins & Stark, 2011).

As mentioned above, racial identification has implications for education. In my opinion, you cannot have a conversation about "race" without including a conversation about racism. Racism includes stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes that denigrate individuals based on their physical appearance (McKown, 2004). Understanding and developing a racial consciousness is a process that begins at an early age. While some adults believe that children are "color innocent" (Park, 2011, p. 387)—that racial and ethnic differences carry little meaning—recent studies found that children are not only familiar with the concept of race but base their evaluation of people on their race (Park, 2011).

However, race-based preferences are not the same as the concept of "racism." Once young people become aware of racism as a dimension of their social world, it can represent a critical point in their development. According to McKown (2004), beliefs about what racism is "may affect how they encode social information, store and retrieve memories of social events, and what to do in response to interracial encounters" (p. 598). An understanding of what constitutes "racism" changes over time, with adolescents recognizing the role of racism in the allocation of opportunities and resources (Quintana, 1998).

In a study conducted on young people's understanding of racism, McKown (2004) found that young people varied substantially in terms of how elaborate and differentiated their ideas were about the definition of racism. He also found that young

people described a wide range of phenomena as examples of racism. His study

included no American Indian young people so their perspectives are missing from this

analysis, but McKown's study does have application in the school environment,

particularly McKown's argument that young people may develop "lay theories" about

racism. Lay theories are knowledge structures young people use to interpret and make

sense of interactions in their lives. According to McKown, if young people have lay

theories about racism, "such theories may affect potentially consequential social

interactions, such as interpretation, memory for, and response to interracial interactions

ranging from a teacher's evaluation to a child's exclusion from a game on the

playground" (p. 613), and so, an individual's racial identity may influence how their

perceive issues of racism.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I used to analyze the meaning my participants made

of their experiences in school emerged from Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit).

TribalCrit emerged from Critical Race Theory (CRT), a branch of legal theory that uses

perspectival experiences to illustrate the role that the legal system has played in

legitimizing the systemic oppression of non-Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Two

common tenets provide the underpinnings for CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The first tenet requires understanding how White supremacy and its subordination of

non-Whites created and maintained the United States of America. The second tenet

centers on examining the relationship between this social structure and rules of law.

Though CRT began as a movement within the critical legal studies school of

jurisprudence, it has moved into other areas of academia, including education. Critical race scholars in education have "theorized, examined, and challenged the ways in which race and racism shape schooling structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004, p. 3).

TribalCrit addresses the uniqueness that American Indians hold in this conversation on critical race and critical thinking towards race in the United States by engaging the status of American Indians as both a raced and colonized people (Brayboy, 2005; Grande, 2004). As a theoretical framework, TribalCrit questions the structural inequalities and social institutions that maintain and reproduce the oppression brought about by colonialism and racism. American Indians are still members of sovereign nations battling with the U.S. government for tribal rights, while simultaneously they are subject to race-based policies and practices as de facto U.S. citizens. TribalCrit serves as a theoretical lens through which to view the ongoing challenges faced in American Indian education, which includes low academic achievement in K-12, low high school graduation rates, low entry into and failure to persist in higher education, and lack of representation, both in curriculum and as school personnel. Although there are nine commonly recognized tenets of TribalCrit, the two most related to my study are its fifth and sixth.[12] The fifth tenet states that concepts of

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[12] The nine tenets of TribalCrit are: 1) Colonization is endemic to society; 2) U.S. policies toward Indigenous people are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and material gain; 3) Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the politicized and racialized natures of our identities; 4) Indigenous people have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification; 5) The concepts of knowledge, power, and culture take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens; 6) Governmental and educational policies towards Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goals of assimilation; 7) Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions of the future are central to understanding the lived

culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an indigenous lens. The sixth tenet recognizes that governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation (Brayboy, 2005). Since my study examines how students make meaning of their experiences as American Indian students in mainstream spaces, I use these tenets to illustrate why the American Indian experience differs from that of White students. I use the fifth tenet because the ideas of culture, knowledge, and power interact daily in schools. TribalCrit argues that American Indian students will see those ideas differently because of their identity. Since I am asking the students to make meaning of their experiences, it makes sense to acknowledge that their American Indian identity might influence their perception of these ideas. I use the sixth tenet because I believe that schools still act as sites of assimilation, and this tenet helps to determine how schools and educators enact assimilationist practices.

Methodology

This is a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2009), which draws on phenomenology to understand the experiences of the students in my study. The central question asked was how American Indian students make meaning of their experiences in their eighth grade social studies classes. Given my interest in their experiences, I used a phenomenological approach. There are multiple ways of defining phenomenology. van Manen (1990) explains, "Phenomenology aims at gaining a

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realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups; 8) Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory, and therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being; and 9) Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work toward social change. Brayboy (2005)

deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). Moustakas (1994) writes that phenomenology is a "return to things just as they are given, removed from every day routines and biases, from which we are told is true in nature and in the natural world of everyday living" (p. 58). Creswell (1998) argues that phenomenological studies describe "the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). Lastly, Crotty (2003) simply states that phenomenologists study the "things themselves" (p. 79). At its very basic level, phenomenology is the study of every day experiences that seem common (such as the experience of attending school). However, people often make assumptions about their understanding of these lived experiences, and rely on phenomenology to provide "the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Phenomenology allows researchers access into this sense making that others do in this world.

There are several key foundational concepts used in phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998). The first is that phenomenological research is the study of essences. This requires researchers to uncover the underlying meaning or theme of the studied experience. Next, phenomenological research emphasizes intentionality. Creswell argues that intentionality is "where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning" (p. 52). Understanding this "requires us to be present to ourselves and to things in our world, that we recognize that self and world are inseparable components of meaning" (Moustakas, p. 28). The

consciousness informs how individuals make meaning of their experiences. The goal of phenomenology, then, is to understand how people make sense of those experiences before analysis influences those understandings.

Finally, phenomenology requires that researchers engage in a process known as "bracketing" or epoche. Sometimes researchers use the terms interchangeably to describe the process in which researchers set aside their preconceived ideas and experiences to understand the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 1998; Ashworth, 1999). However, in some ways, epoche and bracketing are different. According to Bednall (2006), "Epoche can reasonably be interpreted as highlighting a particular period when significant events occur in the experiences of a researcher, but any impact from the memory of which needs to be put aside during data collection" (p. 4). Bracketing, on the other hand, occurs within the data interpretation process. To illustrate, within my own research, epoche occurs prior to my research, as I make sense of my own experiences as an American Indian student attending predominately-White schools. Then throughout the data analysis process, acts of bracketing would occur "at those interpretive moments when a researcher holds each of the identified phenomena up for serious inspection" (Bednall, p. 3). Individuals do not "forget" those experiences that influence their interpretation but rather make explicit the beliefs, theories, and assumptions about the phenomenon.

Before discussing my study, I think it is important that I situate my identity within the research. As a member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, I

identify as an American Indian. In many ways, I am both an insider/outsider to my study. Although my American Indian identity did not share the same level of salience as the identity of my participants, my experiences in mainstream schools mirrored their experience. This balancing act as an insider/outsider researcher ultimately benefitted my study. Recognition of this dynamic required me to make thoughtful, careful decisions about the research process including how I engaged with participants, how I analyzed the data, and ultimately, how I represent this research publicly.

Research Site

I conducted my research at Leaf Lake Middle School, located in the city of Leaf Lake. Leaf Lake is a rural community in a Midwestern state. Nearby is the Leaf Lake Indian reservation. Leaf Lake Middle School is a large building, located in the middle of Leaf Lake. Formerly Leaf Lake High school, it feels antiquated. The classrooms do not have air conditioning, the posters on the wall are decayed and yellowed, and very little updated technology exists in the classrooms. Despite the close proximity to the Leaf Lake Indian reservation, the school does not include many posters or other visual pieces of art that include American Indian people. The only artifact I saw existed in the library and it was a map of American Indian tribes in the U.S. (and was decades old).

I conducted a majority of my fieldwork in the eighth grade World Geography classroom of Mr. John Hanson. The room arrangement had all of the desks facing the front of the room; Mr. Hanson had two desks, one behind the students' desks, and one facing their desks. Throughout the room, I counted approximately 40 posters on athletics, geography, and generic motivational topics. Only two posters featured non-

White people: a poster of Martin Luther King, Jr. and a poster of Mahatma Gandhi. None of the posters included any American Indian representation. In addition to the posters, the front of the room contained two large, world maps. Student-drawn country flags hung from the ceiling. According to the teacher, students had assigned seats, which he changed periodically.

Participants

Overall, my study consisted of nine participants. It included three school personnel: Matt Longley, Principal of Leaf Lake Middle School, John Hanson, eighth Grade Social Studies Teacher, and Seth Ravenwood, the Education Aide. Seth is the only member of the school personnel who identified as American Indian. It also included five eighth-grade students: Melita, Gertie, Lara, Freddie, and Grace. Grace, Freddy, Lara and Mr. Ravenwood live on the Leaf Lake Indian Reservation. The other participants live in Leaf Lake or surrounding communities. Despite not living on the reservation, Melita and Gertie remained connected to Leaf Lake Indian Reservation and participated in community events frequently.

I provide brief biographies of each participant below. I base these biographies on information collected during our interviews.

Melita—Melita lives in Ashton, a community next to the Leaf Lake community. She lives with her mother, her father, and her two brothers. Melita identifies as half-American Indian and half-Hispanic, although she says that she aligns mostly with her American Indian culture. She also has two dogs she considers to be like family. In her free time, she likes to draw, play basketball, and play with her dogs.

She plans to attend college and wants to study graphic design. She plans to be a graphic designer because she likes drawing and could turn her drawings into something other people besides herself could enjoy.

Gertie—Gertie lives in the Leaf Lake community with her father, stepmother, five sisters, and three brothers. She identifies as American Indian and Hispanic. Gertie participates in band and volunteers in the community with Girl Scouts. She wants to attend college because it provides a good job for the future. She thinks she might want to be a nurse, a dental hygienist, or a dentist.

Lara—Lara lives on the Leaf Lake Indian Reservation with her grandmother, brother, aunt, uncle, and two cousins. Lara identifies as American Indian. She enjoys spending time with her family and traveling to powwows. She plays volleyball, basketball, and runs track at Leaf Lake Middle School. She wants to attend a tribal college because it offers more support for American Indians. When she grows up, she wants to be an author or a lawyer.

Freddy—Freddy lives on Leaf Lake Indian Reservation with his father, mother, and two sisters. Freddy identifies as American Indian. He has a large extended family, who also lives on the reservation. Freddy likes to spend his time making origami or drawing pictures. Freddy wants to attend college but does not know where.

Grace—Grace lives on Leaf Lake Indian Reservation with her grandmother, who adopted her several years ago. Grace identifies as American Indian. In her free time, she takes walks with her little brother. She also plays basketball for Leaf Lake Middle School and is interested in playing basketball in high school. She plans to

attend college to make her grandmother, or at least someone, proud. She is interested in

being a film director but does not know just yet, as there are many choices for future

jobs.

Matt Longley—Matt is the principal of Leaf Lake Middle School. Matt

identifies as White. He grew up in the same Midwestern state as Leaf Lake and

attended a small, private college. After college, he taught high school mathematics for

nine years in a predominately-White neighboring community of Leaf Lake. During this

time, he received his Master's degree in educational leadership. In 2010, he

interviewed for the middle school principal position and received it. Matt found the

position at Leaf Lake intriguing because he did not have much experience working

with non-White student populations.

John Hanson—John is the eighth grade social studies teacher at Leaf Lake

Middle School. John identifies as White. He grew up in an urban city, located about

300 miles from Leaf Lake. John attended college in the same state as Leaf Lake, where

he met his wife. After teaching at-risk[13] students in different states, he applied for the

social studies position at Leaf Lake Middle School and received it. He has his Master's

degree in geography education. John lives in Leaf Lake with his family and is a well-

known and respected athletic coach.

Seth Ravenwood—Seth is the education aide at Leaf Lake Middle School. He

identifies as American Indian and lives on the Leaf Lake Indian reservation. Seth

started working at Leaf Lake after a series of manufacturing and technical jobs. As the

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[13] Based on our interview, it seems that John used the term "at-risk" as code for "non-White student population." He never explained why the students were "at-risk."

education aide, he serves the American Indian students by assisting them during class. Seth considers his position undefined—therefore he feels his biggest responsibility is making sure American Indian students recognize him as an advocate for them in the school system.

Data Collection

I collected data over the final quarter of the 2011-2012 school year. I was on-site for three to four days a week for ten weeks, observing for approximately 245 hours. I spent a majority of my time in the classroom of Mr. Hanson, the only eighth grade social studies teacher in the school. During each class, I took detailed field notes on the classroom curriculum, student participation, and teacher commentary. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each student during their study hall period, with each interview lasting between 20-60 minutes. I also met periodically with the school principal and education associate, who worked primarily with American Indian students. Additionally, I held regular conversations with Mr. Hanson regarding the class. While I served primarily as an observer, I interacted with students before, after, and during class time. I also attended all in-school assemblies the students attended.

Data Analysis

The first step of the data analysis process included the organization and processing of field notes and recorded interviews. After transcribing and typing all notes, I uploaded all files to NVivo 10, a qualitative research software package that assists in electronically organizing data. After I organized the data, I read the notes and

interview transcripts to obtain a general sense of the depth of the research I collected (Creswell, 2003). At this initial stage, I wrote several analytic memos, which aided in the coding process. I performed two cycles of data coding. During the first cycle, I did both initial and simultaneous coding. Initial coding is a method that works well with almost all qualitative studies. At this stage, codes are tentative. I also used simultaneous coding, which is appropriate when "the data's content suggests multiple meanings that necessitate and justify more than one code" (Saldana, 2009, p. 62). For example, if a student shared an exchange with a classmate that involved racial language, I coded that as "racial language" and "interaction with classmate." After concluding the initial coding process, I conducted a second cycle using a focused coding method. Focused coding organizes the data around the most salient categories, and required me to make decisions as to which codes made the most analytic sense for my research study (Saldana, 2009).

Criteria for Depth and Accuracy

I used several strategies to ensure the accuracy of my research findings. The first strategy involved data triangulation. I used multiple data sources such as interviews from students, interviews from school personnel, and my own observations, to justify my themes. I provided participants with copies of their transcripts in order to check for accuracy. When I did classroom observations, I was in the classroom several days a week for approximately eight weeks. I also engaged with several faculty members who provided me with the opportunity to use peer debriefing in an effort to

make the account accessible to others beyond myself as the researcher (Creswell, 2003).

<div align="center">**Findings**</div>

The purpose of my study was to understand how American Indian students made meaning of their experiences at Leaf Lake Middle School, including how they made meaning of the concept of "race" and racism within the context of a mainstream school environment. I divided the findings into four categories: "being" an American Indian at Leaf Lake Middle School, their experiences as the "Other," their interactions with classmates, and their understanding of the concepts of "race" and racism.

"Being" an American Indian at Leaf Lake (American Indian Identity at School)

Based on my interviews with the participants and school personnel, there are several different experiences of "being" American Indian at Leaf Lake. The participants indicated they felt privileged to be American Indian. Grace stated

> I can, like, feel privileged to be a Native American because not many
>
> are going to be around Leaf Lake anymore [since most of the American
>
> Indian students attend the reservation school]. I feel good to be coming
>
> here because I could probably get a better education and I like being
>
> Native American.

Melita echoed this sentiment, sharing, "You're not like…you're just another race in the school… [and since] there probably [will] be barely any Native Americans, you'll be sort of unique." Freddy felt that being American Indian at Leaf Lake Middle School made him special. He shared, "Well, I feel like I stand out. I feel special among the

others." Freddy also believed being American Indian made him different from other students. When asked why American Indian students were different from other students, he replied, "I mean we speak our own language…um…the way we act. The way we talk to each other." The participants in the study indicated a strong understanding of their positionality as American Indian students at Leaf Lake.

School personnel, however, felt that the American Indian students maintained distance from their identity at school. According to Mr. Hanson, "Native American students here, I would say a lot of Native American students here put on their game face when they come to school because they know very well they have to fit in." When asked for clarification, Mr. Hanson shared the community perception of American Indians was negative and students understood this. Mr. Ravenwood, the only American Indian staff member at Leaf Lake echoed this sentiment. He shared

> Some of them [American Indian students] go to [the reservation], some
>
> of them go to [reservation] functions and they are really well behaved
>
> and then when I see them here it's just like they put on a different kind
>
> of game face, it's like their personalities, it's like no one is going to push
>
> me.

When asked directly, none of the student participants indicated this. However, from our interviews, student participants shared differences between the American Indian and White students at Leaf Lake Middle School.

One primary difference between American Indian students and White students occurred academically. Lara indicated being American Indian at Leaf Lake meant

being different academically. Lara stated

> Um, I guess, the schooling. Um, in academic ways. I see a lot more
> White kids that have better grades and like not much Native Americans
> have good grades. Like, you see that some Native Americans need more
> help, like the academic awards tonight; there are more White kids than
> Native kids going.

Grace shared she does not "fit in" in the classroom. She said

> Because I guess I'm more afraid that I'll get judged upon my traditions and
> what I do and my skin color maybe, because usually nowadays if you're a
> different color you have to say all the right things and wear all the right clothes
> just to be in with the group. I'm scared to say things out loud, because I'm
> scared to be wrong, so I usually don't participate. But I'm just scared to like
> raise my hand to, and question someone, or say the answer, because I'm scared
> to be wrong.

Other participants shared the same perspectives as Grace. When I asked about participation in class Freddy told me, "Most of them [American Indians] are just quiet, to themselves. In class, I'm mostly quiet. Most of the time I'm just shy or don't have an answer." Lara shared she did not participate in class "because there's a lot of students there and I don't feel comfortable talking in front of a lot of people. And some of the stuff I don't really get so I'm afraid of saying the wrong answer." Gertie and Melita also indicated a hesitancy to participate and share in class for "fear of saying the wrong thing and getting into trouble (Melita)." Mr. Hanson, the eighth grade social

studies teacher, confirmed the hesitancy of American Indian students to ask questions in class. When I shared this observation with Mr. Hanson, he stated

> That I just – that I catch myself doing that. And I want to go back [to something earlier]. I like Freddy, but I jumped all over him earlier this year about not paying attention and just because I was just – we had just gotten out of a meeting and it's the first hour and I was just mad and I jumped all over him and here there he is this poor kid is standing there, not knowing what's going on, sitting there crying and he was just sitting there trying to decipher these directions.

Mr. Hanson shared that he observed other teachers treating American Indian students similarly. Throughout my observations, I noticed this phenomenon as well. When American Indian students asked the teacher a question, the teacher's response to the student was something along the lines of "I've already told you that," "We went over that already," "Read the directions," or "Pay better attention." However, I rarely saw American Indian students ask questions, instead working quietly or asking their neighbors for assistance once Mr. Hanson stopped lecturing.

Participants described experiences in which they or other students and teachers positioned American Indians outside of what was "normal" at Leaf Lake Middle School. According to Grace, American Indians are meaner than White students at Leaf Lake Middle School.

> Well, yeah, I guess Native Americans tend to be like meaner…And I mean, White people, I guess aren't used to that, so they can get kind of

scared of Native Americans. [Native Americans are meaner because] I

guess they still think of the past, how White people took their land and

so they think that's unfair, and I guess they're still like that. And I guess

their parents tell them that.

Freddy echoed this, and shared, "They [White people] say we're just outgoing, mostly,

sometimes wild. Just lash out on people for no reason."

Melita, however, felt that American Indian students purposely maintained

distance from the White student experience at Leaf Lake. When I asked her to describe

how American Indian students differed from White students, she shared the following

example.

We know our own terms and Natives, we can like, we can say

something and we'll get it because we learned it together. And then

other [White] people will wonder what we said and then they won't

really know. And Natives, we know some words and we'll like use them

sometimes and then the other [White] people will be like, they'll say,

what does that mean? And we'll just tell them…or we'll decide should

we tell them or not tell them, and then we're like, and if like we say

don't tell them we'll make up, we'll just basically make up a nice way

to say it or use a more common word. It's probably why we [American

Indians] stay together. Like we'll be joking around and we'll just say,

"Sad quit acting bogess." And when they [White students] ask what it

means and like they already know what sad means…but we don't tell

them bogess means "acting drunk." So then we just keep certain words

to ourselves. We do that so that, like, so we can like still use our own

language and not have other people saying it even if they don't know

what it means. And also they keep using it and they'll be using it and

using it and using it. And it'll get old and we won't want to say it

anymore.

Freddy and Gertie also indicated they withheld information from White students when

questioned, mostly because they were unsure of how their White classmates would use

the information.

The participants indicated they were different from their White peers

academically. For example, Melita shared that American Indian students and White

students did not approach group work the same.

We'll be in group work and then they'll [White people] say, well maybe

it's this and we'll [American Indians] be like no, maybe it's this one and

we'll give our explanation. And they'll give their explanation, and then

they'll still think they are right, and then we'll usually just say, "think

about it" this one [answer] seems more accurate to question, and then

they'll say, "oh, let's just ask the teacher" and then when they just go

straight to the teacher and they don't think about it.

Grace, Freddy, Lara, and Melita also indicated that American Indian students have

different learning preferences than White students. Melita shared that American

Indians are visual learners and more likely to reword a concept for it to make more

sense. In her opinion, White students just use what the teacher provided and "stick with what's written down."

Interactions with Classmates

In order to gain a sense of understanding about my participants' experiences in school, I asked each participant to discuss their interactions with their classmates. The participants divided their interactions into those with American Indian students, with Hispanic[14] students, and with White students. The students described three different sets of interaction patterns, related to the racial identity of those groups.

The participants stated they were most at ease interacting with other American Indian students. Grace shared that this was because "we have our own language, our Native American language, so we know what we're talking about. And we get along just fine." Freddy felt he could talk about home with other American Indian students and shared, "we just talk about how life's going…if they are going to any powwows….you know, life on the reservation." Lara felt more comfortable with other American Indian students because American Indian students "stuck up" for other American Indian students regardless of their friendship status. She shared, "We all just joke around and everything. And we don't, like, when people talk back we usually stick up for them, if we're friends or not." Melita told me that she enjoyed hanging out with other American Indians because they shared similar senses of humor. According to Melita, "We usually hang out after school and so then we'll have inside jokes that

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[14] In the eighth grade, 38 students are identified as Hispanic, 46 are identified as White, and 10 are identified as American Indian. However, if a student marks they identify as Hispanic and another identity, the default designation is Hispanic only. "Hispanic" is the term used by the participants and the school, which is why I use it.

like only we could understand. And then usually it's our inside jokes, [which] are hard

to explain to other people." Participants indicated American Indians were their primary

social group at school.

They also discussed their interactions with Hispanic students. Melita indicated

her interactions with Hispanic students were similar to those of American Indian

students, although not identical.

Umm, like I talk to them not as much, like not a lot, not like how I talk

to my Native friends, but like I'll talk to them and we'll joke around

sometimes too. But like I don't understand Spanish so then they can't

say anything in Spanish to me. And then like sometimes we'll hang out

after school, and so then, we'll also have inside jokes, so we'll like get

along. So basically, I get along with Hispanics and Natives.

Freddy indicated that he treated Hispanic students the same way as he treated his

American Indian friends because "they are like me, different in school from the other

White people." However, despite the similarity between groups, Lara indicated a

tension between American Indian students and Hispanic students. She shared that

oftentimes "Hispanics say 'Go back to your homeland.' And then the Natives would

take that offensive and say mean stuff back." Lara stressed that while she considered

herself friendly toward Hispanics, "we really don't interact with them…and we really

don't get along."

The final group students interacted with was White students. Mr. Hanson

shared that it was common for White students and community members to refer to

American Indian students at Leaf Lake as "apples"—"you know, red on the outside, white on the inside." Grace did not interact with White students in school, but she shared, "Uh, I guess I could get along with them, I mean, they know how I am [American Indian] and they're not mean at all really." When I asked Grace to expand on why it is important White students "know" she is American Indian, she pointed to the differences in their cultural expectations. According to Grace, "They know that our traditions prevent us from doing certain things." Freddy also indicated a sense of difference between American Indian students and White students. Freddy shared that "Some of them [White students] say we're cool. Some of them just look at us like we're different. And some of them just don't like us."

Despite indicating that some White students consider American Indians "cool," Freddy described his interactions with White students negatively. Freddy, who wears his hair long per tribal tradition, said White students often asked him about this hair— but when he shared why his hair was long, the White students immediately started making fun of his religion. He also shared, "Ah, some students, some of them learn [American Indian] words and they keep saying it to us, and they keep making it another meaning and stuff." He went on to tell me he feels angry and sad when White students use American Indian language inappropriately. Lara stated she tries to be friendly toward White students, but she does not understand them.

> Um, they're like, they're like hyper. It seems like they are hyper. If they
> talk a lot I just sit there and listen. I'm really not a talkative person, so I
> just say, "Yeah" or go along with what they are talking about. But I

really don't get what they're saying. Like, if they're talking about

football or volleyball. I'm just like, "okay, umm, I'm interested" but I'm

really not. I just try to be friendly and say nice things and go along with

it.

Each participant indicated "being friendly" was important in interactions with White

students.

Melita indicated interactions with White students involved answering questions

about American Indian culture

Like, they treat us normal and sometimes they will ask like certain

questions about like some of our traditions and like our culture. Like

probably what do you normally do at a feast. And sometimes they ask

like what it is like at night time in the woods on the reservation. And

probably what it is like to be, like to live with other Natives in basically

your own town. And it's not like I'm not offended or anything. But I

feel okay because somebody, like, at least, you know, somebody wants

to know about your culture.

Each participant shared that they received questions about American Indian religion,

life on the reservation, and American Indian culture from their White classmates

almost daily. Grace told me, "They ask about what I dance, or wear regalia with the

culture, and what kind of food that there is and what do we eat, and is it hard to speak

the Native American language, which it is!"

Concept of "Race" and "Racism"

In addition to learning about the experiences of American Indian students at a mainstream middle school, I was also interested in understanding how the concepts of "race" and by extension, racism were exhibited in the school environment. When I asked participants to define the concept of "race," each participant stated "race" was one's skin color or one's culture. When I asked students to provide examples of when they discussed the concept of "race" in school, the participants' responses varied. Grace shared that she learned that "all races are violent" during a discussion on the Trayvon Martin shooting. When asked to elaborate, Grace indicated that her teacher told her people of all races acted violently toward each other, and an example of this was that a Hispanic man shot Trayvon. However, the participants mostly shared that "race" was discussed during Black History Month, or when learning about the Civil Rights movement. Any discussion of race in their classrooms focused heavily on the experiences of Black people in the U.S. with minimal information on the American Indian experience. For example, Freddy shared that he learned a lot about the role Black and Latino/a people played in the Civil Rights movement, but only that "American Indians received their civil rights from the government."

The school administrators I interviewed indicated that racial diversity is a valuable element of the educational experience at Leaf Lake Middle School, although it is not always evident within the school setting. Mr. Longley shared this about Leaf Lake Middle School.

I think cultural aspects are an important part of [learning]…I think when

you look at our staff…there is limited diversity in our staff and

sometimes you almost walk on eggshells to make sure everyone feels

the same…I know traditionally that's been a massive struggle here

because everybody [teachers] wants everybody [students] to be the

same. It's an education model I think. I don't think we do a very good

job of allowing students to promote their cultures or to have an identity

that "I am Native and that I should be proud with that." Um, and I think

it's been a fear of staff to grasp the culture and to showcase it rather

than to hide behind it.

Mr. Hanson also echoed the importance of "diversity" at Leaf Lake Middle School, but

drew a distinction between "diversity" and "race."

To not celebrate the diversity we have in the school district is silly. My

student teacher specifically came here because she put on her

application she wants to experience as much diversity as possible

because she wants to teach in a big city. She got a handful. I mean, she

got Hispanic, she got, I mean, all of these things. And [for] you to not

celebrate the diversity that's here is just – it's silly for me….[However]

I don't think it's important for them [American Indian students] to draw

a line racially or identify racially but I think it's important for them to

understand that everybody brings different baggage.

Despite the emphasis of my questions on the concept of "race," both Mr. Longley and

Mr. Hanson used the terms "diversity," "culture," or "identity" in their responses.

I also asked the participants to define "racism." Their definitions were:

- "Like being against other races, making fun of them." (Freddy)

- "People are mean and like it described people, they don't know them but they describe them in a mean way and they judge them." (Gertie)

- "People who judge one another about their skin color." (Grace)

- "Um, like, your background and where you come from and who your ancestors like and what they brought down to you. Your color. That's how I see it. Color." (Lara)

- "People criticizing other people based on the color of their skin." (Melita)

I followed up by asking students to describe any examples of racism they

witnessed at Leaf Lake Middle School. Students indicated that racism occurred at

school, and described it in different ways. Freddy shared, "Well some racism goes on

here, some I know about, some I don't know about." Gertie, on the other hand,

provided specific examples.

Well, like people comment…but it's joking and stuff. But it could hurt

somebody for real. There is like only one Black kid in the seventh

grade. They [White people] don't make fun of him, they like to mess

around with him and like say…call him the N word at times. They

[White students] also call Hispanics "beans." Because we eat beans. It

used to be an insult but now we take it like, as like, something as pride.

We reversed it.

Mr. Ravenwood indicated American Indian students thought racism occurred more often than it did.

Oh yeah, they'll [American Indian students] say so and so is racist because...and then I get the whole picture first and then decide is it racist or not, and most of the time it's not. They'll [American Indian students] say it is. This kid did something where there were two White kids and an Indian involved…and the student [American Indian student] said it was racist because he was the only one singled out over the other two... But sometimes you have to tell them they shouldn't have been caught doing that kind of stuff in the first place. So trying to explain it to them that way rather than say "oh that's racist." [I asked him if he thought it was racist]. Um, no. Well, to me, it's that the kids shouldn't be doing something in the first place. I guess if it was somebody else they would say oh it's racist, but teachers have their favorites too.

While Mr. Ravenwood did acknowledge the presence of racism in the community, in his opinion it did not extend to the school.

Discussion

In this section, I offer a discussion of the previous general findings. I divide the section into two parts. In the first part, I discuss what it means to "be" an American

Indian student at Leaf Lake Middle School. In the second part, I discuss the experience of "race" and racism in the school.

What It Means To "Be" an American Indian

In order to understand how my participants experienced "being" an American Indian student in a mainstream school, I framed their identity expression within acculturation. Several scholars (Garrett, 1996; LaFromboise et al, 1990; Spindler & Spindler, 1958) argue one way to "classify" American Indian identity is by the level of acculturation experienced by individuals who identify as American Indian. According to Garrett, there are three primary levels of acculturation: "traditional," "bicultural," and "assimilated." American Indian students who consider themselves "traditional" spent most of their lives normalized to the cultural expectations of their tribe. Students who define themselves as "bicultural" acknowledge their American Indian identity but can also speak to life within the majority of American culture. According to Klug and Whitfield (2003), individuals who identify as "assimilated" often describe themselves as "out of touch" with their American Indian identity.

Based on my interviews with the participants, I consider their level of acculturation to be "traditional." My participants felt proud of their identity as American Indians in school, and recognized their identity made them different from their peers. They expressed their identity by wearing tribal-affiliated clothing, adhering to certain cultural practices, and discussing publicly their involvement in tribal activities and customs. My participants did not hide their identity, and instead claimed it throughout their interactions in school. However, despite their level of pride in their

American Indian identity, the students in my study indicated that as American Indians they experienced school differently than their peers. Their acknowledgement of this difference is important because it demonstrates they believe their racial identity has some influence on what occurs in school.

The participants described several different aspects of their school experience where their American Indian identity influenced that particular part of their school experience. The two aspects of their experience I discuss involve their experiences in the classroom environment and their interactions with peers.

In the classroom. Based on my interviews and observations, American Indian students rarely participated in the classroom. They provided several reasons for their lack of participation. Many of the participants claimed they did not participate because they were quiet or shy. Several participants alluded to their non-participation as a result of not being as "smart" as their White peers. The participants did not feel they could answer the question or contribute to the discussion and therefore remained silent. When it came to large class discussion, I observed White students participating at far greater rates than the American Indian students participated. However, this shyness did not extend to any group work activities as the participants fully participated with their peers when given a team task or challenge. A key factor in this, however, is that students did choose their own groups and each time the American Indian students worked with other American Indian students. In this situation, the participants felt their learning styles differed so much from White peers that it made more sense to pair with another American Indian student.

The second, and more problematic reason for their lack of participation, was fear. Participants feared doing "something" wrong and/or getting into trouble. Though either fear was enough on its own to justify disengaging, participants occasionally linked these experiences together—giving the wrong answer meant receiving a reprimand from the teacher. The participants in my study indicated they felt pressure to provide the right answer. If they were unsure of the answer, they chose to remain silent. Related to this practice, my participants shared that asking questions of the teacher led to "trouble;" therefore, they never asked questions of the teacher, preferring to speak to other students. Their fears were realized, for during my observations, any time an American Indian student asked a question, the teacher accused them of not paying attention. When a White student asked a question, the teacher took time to respond. Whether intentionally or not, the message sent to the students by the teacher indicated that asking questions was problematic behavior. It became easier for the participants to remain silent and not understand the material rather than risk being reprimanded publicly.

Many factors drive why a student does or does not participate in class. However, the structure of the class did not consider that there might be a difference in participation patterns between American Indians and White students. For example, in many American Indian communities, participation occurs after students have the opportunity to observe. The nature of Mr. Hanson's lessons did not allow for observation. A typical lesson involved Mr. Hanson introducing the topic through a handout, giving students a short time to complete the handout, and then asking a series

of questions about the handout. This format did not allow for much "think time" nor did Mr. Hanson's approach favor students who might not raise their hand immediately. While I agree that some students choose not to participate based on their personality, an important consideration in designing participation opportunities in the classroom are the different cultural values students bring to the class related to communication. When teachers recognize these values, they acknowledge that American Indian students may hold different perspectives than other students in their classes, a key element of TribalCrit.

The more concerning reason for the participants' lack of participation was the fear of repercussions for asking questions or giving the wrong answer when responding. By creating a classroom environment where certain participation is punished, Mr. Hanson further marginalizes a group of students who, culturally, might already struggle with the "normal" classroom expectations of participation. The participants identified that they felt their White peers were better academically. By accusing students of not paying attention when they ask questions, Mr. Hanson is making a public judgment about their classroom behavior. However, more problematic was his treatment of White students' questions as valid and appropriate. By doing this, Mr. Hanson confirms for the American Indian students that their White peers are different from them academically.

Interactions with classmates. An important element of the school environment is the ability for students to "practice" their identities. Faircloth (2012) argues that students negotiate their memberships in school based on their racial identity. I found

this evident with my participants. When asked to describe their interactions with their classmates, each participant immediately described three groups: other American Indian students, Hispanic students, and White students. My participants indicated that comfort level and interaction patterns differed based on racial identity. Even though my participants attended school with most of these students for eight years, they considered themselves mostly separate from the White students, and slightly aligned with the Hispanic students.

Not surprising, participants stated they felt most at ease with other American Indian students. This makes sense since all of the American Indian students at school affiliate themselves with the Leaf Lake tribe and share similar cultural values and expectations. Having other American Indian students at school created a somewhat safe space for my participants in that they felt there were students who would defend them if need be. Being able to talk about "home" or share jokes seemed very important for their well-being. Even though not all the participants lived on the reservation, they made it clear they all participated in tribal-related events. This affiliation and shared identity was important to the schooling experience of my participants.

While the students closely aligned themselves with their American Indian peers, they did not feel the same affinity for their Hispanic peers. They shared a common experience in their positionality as non-White within a mainstream school space, but the participants pointed out several cultural differences that separated them, language being one of the primary barriers. There was also racial tension between the groups, with Hispanic students telling American Indian students to return "to their

homeland." It is important for school personnel to remember that the experiences of non-White students differ based on their racial and cultural identity.

The interactions with the White students presented the largest source of discomfort for my participants. The participants were very aware of how their White peers viewed them and how this perception differed from how they saw themselves. The participants shared that their White peers viewed them as mean, wild, willing to lash out, and angry. At the same time, the participants stressed how friendly they treated all students, even White students. It was clear the participants wanted to distance themselves from these perspectives. However, their attempts at being friendly did not change the overall tone of their interactions with White peers.

While teasing occurs in schools, the teasing experienced by the students was one-sided. Teasing was something that happened to them, and they felt that responding was only creating, as Lara stated, "more trouble for us." Likewise, the teasing did not occur over instances within school, for example, being teased for dropping a tray in the lunchroom. The White students directed their teasing toward specific aspects of the American Indian students' racialized identity. By calling the American Indian students "apples," the White students basically tried to assert that American Indian students were not "traditional" (as they demonstrated in school) but were instead "assimilated" and/or "acculturated" in terms of Garrett's (1996) taxonomy. By de-legitimizing the racial identity of American Indian students, the White students created conditions for American Indian students receiving unfair treatment not conducive to their

developmental needs and cultural styles. American Indian students attempted to survive this teasing/essentializing by non-reaction.

On the other hand, White peers essentialized the experiences of their American Indian classmates, reducing them to caricatures of the American Indian experience. Even when White students asked questions about cultural and language practices, the participants felt skeptical about this interest—sometimes the White students displayed a general interest; other times, the White students used the information to tease. In response to this confusion, the American Indian students withheld cultural knowledge from their White peers. For example, if American Indian students used words from their tribal language and White students expressed interest in those words, the American Indian students provided false definitions of those words. This was the only way to remain friendly while still preserving ownership over facets of their cultural identity.

The Experience of "Race" and Racism at Leaf Lake

The principal and teacher articulated varying disconnected messages on racial identity. The first concerned the importance of racial identity. Both the principal and teacher acknowledged that "diversity" was important in the school and something to celebrate, yet this celebration did not occur in the school. From the principal's perspective, any manifestation of celebrated diversity would disrupt the teachers' notion that "everybody wants everybody to be the same." This thought process is a form of "colorblindness." Educators employ colorblindness as a tool of assimilation by asserting that all students are the "same," which ignores the lived experience of the

American Indian students at Leaf Lake Middle School. Celebrating diversity is considered acceptable but not at the expense of making White people feel different, or placing them outside what educators might consider the White students' cognitive and experiential comfort zone.

Mr. Hanson, the schoolteacher, also offered a disconnected message of the importance of racial identity. While he recognized the demographics of the school offered its students a different experience than other schools in the area, so much so that student teachers wanted to work in this school because of their exposure to different racial identities, he also dismissed the need for American Indian students to identify racially. His statement that "everyone brings different baggage" assumed that that all students experience race in the same ways and further that these racialized experiences are negative. By making this presumption, Mr. Hanson denied students the opportunity to bring their lived experiences into the classroom and ignored the reality that American Indian students may view their school experiences through a different lens than their peers. Students often believe that their teachers are "wise" and teach "what we need to know." Despite the beliefs articulated by the teacher and school principal that their school environment supported identity ownership, the school's practices did not reflect this support. Even though schools may believe they have committed adequate resources to the education of American Indian students, American Indian students still experience a school environment that favors the majority White culture.

Mr. Hanson and Mr. Longley were also reluctant to use the term "race." Mr.

Hanson did use the term "racially" but in direct response to my question about

students' racial expressions in schools. Despite the emphasis of my questions on race,

both school personnel chose to use "culture" or "diversity" as substitutes for the word

"race." I consider "culture" and "diversity" less loaded terminology than "race." By

using "diversity" or "culture" school personnel can refer to their student difference but

not technically identify what that difference is. This creates a safe space for the school

personnel in that they remove any challenges related to conversations on race.

However, by doing this, no conversations about the influence of race occur in the

school, even though the students are engaging in racialized interactions.

Knowing how students define race and racism assists in identifying their

experiences as racialized individuals in school. Throughout my interviews, when I used

the word "race," participants responded by using the word "culture," yet, at the same

time, recognized what I meant by the word "race" because they used racial categories

to discuss their classmates. In the U.S., American Indians are positioned as a racialized

group for the purposes of governmental policies. American Indian groups, based on

their tribal affiliation, exist as sovereign nations. TribalCrit argues that this

positionality illustrates the unique position American Indians hold in the U.S. This

positionality also renders conversations limited to race alone an ineffective means of

understanding the experience of American Indians in the U.S.

The ways in which the students defined "racism" was also crucial. In the

students' experience, "racism" occurred when people teased or made fun of someone

based on their skin color. The only examples the student participants provided involved the interactions of Black and White people. This narrow definition prevented the students from identifying racist actions taking place in the school, and created a situation where the American Indian students themselves felt responsible for the poor treatment they received from their White peers. Even when asked about name-calling, which in their definition was an example of racism, students felt that this was "different." The students did not subjugate their identity for peer acceptance but at the same time, the students refused to label or acknowledge their White peers as engaging in racist behavior towards them. The "cultural nuance" they learned in school was clear: racism occurred against Black people and labeling anything else as such was problematic. This was most evident in Mr. Ravenwood's dismissal of a student's claim of racism. When a student complained that he felt American Indian students were punished more often than White students were, and this was racist, Mr. Ravenwood did not think racial identity played a role in the punishment. Instead, he claimed that students should not get into trouble in the first place.[15] This refusal by the only American Indian staff member in the school to acknowledge something as potentially racist makes it even harder for students to confront. If the adults cannot talk about race and racism in school, how can students learn to navigate those topics?

Conclusion

There is an inherent messiness in conducting qualitative research with American Indian middle school students. Besides dealing with the normal challenges

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[15] On my last day, about ten minutes before the final bell, I ran into Mr. Ravenwood and he said he gave my interview questions a lot of thought, and perhaps, yes, racism occurred at the school.

of the school environment, such as testing and class schedules, my study asked them to reflect on their experiences as racialized individuals within school. I also limited my study to eighth grade students, which lowered the number of students I could interview.

Despite these limitations, my study does offer insight into the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream schools. It is evident that even when schools claim to support diversity and diverse student populations, the values and norms of the school typically reflect White cultural values, and American Indian students are very aware of how their values do not align with school values. This is most clear when evaluating participation patterns in the classroom. The lack of inclusion of American Indian cultural values created a situation that placed American Indian students at an academic disadvantage compared to their peers.

Additionally, American Indian students must constantly be aware of how they present their identities in schools and how that presentation influences their social location in the school. American Indian students engage in ongoing negotiations related to what they should and should not share about their racial and cultural identity in school. There are several things at stake in this negotiation. If they share, are they opening themselves up to teasing? On the other hand, does sharing their identity educate their peers? Is that their job? Does this position them as even more different from their White peers who do not receive these types of questions about their identity?

Related, while American Indian students are positioned as a racially identified group at school, they sometimes have very limited understanding of the concept of race or racism. The students in my study viewed racism as the result of individual action,

which prevented them from seeing how schools could perpetuate racism. This calls into question the role of the school (and teacher) in teaching about racism. For a group of students likely to experience some form of systemic racism, not discussing it serves to remove it from the conversation. However, not talking about it does not mean it is non-existent. All it means is that schools do not provide students with the tools to understand how race and racism influence their experiences within the context of school.

TribalCrit argues that the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meanings when viewed through indigenous perspectives. While American Indian students viewed their culture as highly significant to their identity and recognized its importance to their community, they viewed knowledge as something held by White students. Brayboy (2005) acknowledges the importance of indigenous knowledge in education settings, however, the participants in my study only acknowledged one knowledge—academic knowledge, which their White peers received recognition for that they did not. Brayboy also writes about power in a universal sense (tribes having the power to exert control in tribal matters), yet within the context of school, power is maintained and controlled by adults. This means that when teachers use their power to enforce White culture values at the expense of American Indian values, they diminish American Indian students' sense of identity.

Despite the claim that schools no longer serve to assimilate students into the White mainstream culture, American Indians students receive pressure daily to assimilate. When schools reward certain patterns of behavior over others, American

Indian students must make a choice—engage in behaviors that go against their cultural background in order to be successful, or continue to engage in their cultural behaviors and risk marginalization in the classroom. This ongoing practice of assimilation is something we must challenge.

This study represents the beginning of research on the experience of American Indian students attending mainstream schools. We need more research on the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream schools, beginning with their primary school experiences. Too often, American Indian students represent a data point in ongoing quantitative studies. More research must place American Indian students at the center and analyze their experiences, not as compared to their peers, but as standalone experiences. Lastly, we must continue to study the influence of school policies, practices, and curriculum on the assimilation of American Indian students to mainstream school values. The American Indian student is absent from the literature on underrepresented students in schools. The best way to support these students intellectually, emotionally, and socially is through research on their specific experiences in school.

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CHAPTER 3: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES: WHAT CURRICULUM TEACHES ABOUT RACE AND CULTURE

A paper to be submitted to *Curriculum Inquiry*

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Due to the growing disparity between the academic performance of American Indian students and their non-American Indian peers, a number of scholars advocate for culturally responsive schooling for American Indian students attending mainstream schools (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Klump & McNeir, 2005; Little Solider, 1989; Sanders, 1987).[16] For American Indian students, it is essential that culturally responsive schooling practices address racism, colonialism, and indigenous epistemologies (Castagno & Brayboy). If educators and administrators want to improve the academic experience for American Indian students by adhering to culturally responsive schooling techniques, a necessary step is evaluating the curriculum and teacher pedagogy for its cultural inclusion and responsiveness. Part of a larger case study on the experiences of American Indian students in a mainstream school, this article looks closely at the curriculum and teacher pedagogy of Mr. Hanson, an eighth grade social studies teacher, whose class is focused on World Geography. Following work on Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), I focus primarily on the ways in which race, culture, and colonialism are treated in the curriculum.

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[16] The literature on American Indian education applies the term "mainstream" to state controlled schools to designate the difference between tribally controlled schools and state controlled schools. This delineation is significant because it acknowledges that tribally controlled schools operate as a function of the sovereign nation status held by American Indian tribes in the U.S. While I use tribally controlled schools to refer to both tribally controlled schools and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, a distinction exists between them. For further information, please see Reyhner (1994) and Tippeconnic (2000).

This article addresses some of the tensions that exist in the call for more culturally responsive schooling. I start by situating my study within the larger conversation on the inclusion of certain concepts in world geography curriculum. Following is the section on my methods and theoretical frameworks. I then discuss my findings on how issues of race, culture, and colonialism are represented in the curriculum. I then return to the idea of culturally responsive schooling and argue that the curriculum normalizes colonialism, minimizes the concept of race and racism, and further marginalizes certain student identities, going against what culturally responsive schooling for American Indians should encompass.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to situate my inquiry into the curriculum at Leaf Lake middle school within the larger body of work related to inclusion of viewpoints in social studies and world geography curricula. To do this I start with a brief overview of my definition of curriculum. Following the section on curriculum, I discuss social studies and geography curriculum as it relates to the concepts of race and culture. I then address color-blind and colonial blind ideology in curriculum choices.

Defining Curriculum

There is no universally accepted definition of curriculum. For example, Eisner (2002) divides the curriculum into three separate units: explicit, implicit, and null. Explicit curricula include subject goals, learning objectives, textbooks, essentially any information regarding the daily operations in the school. Implicit curricula, on the other hand, are the "hidden" messages students receive about classroom behavior,

expectations, and the explicit curriculum. Null curricula are any school subjects that

schools do not teach. Villegas & Lucas (2002) do not divide curriculum into specific

units, but rather define the overall experience

> The learning experiences to which students are exposed as part of their
>
> schooling. This includes the content taught in schools, the textbooks and
>
> materials used to teach this content, and the ways in which learning
>
> experiences are organized in schools and classrooms—all of which are
>
> closely interconnected (p. 50).

While Eisner (2002) is useful for specific curriculum examples, I am bounding

the curriculum I included in my study using the Villegas and Lucas (2002) definition.

Villegas and Lucas conceptualize curriculum as the totality of experiences students are

exposed to in the course of their schooling. This includes not only their course

materials, such as textbooks and course packs, but also the specific lessons and

conversations that take place in the classroom. Eisner does not adequately address how

the design of curriculum "contributes to the reproduction and perpetuation of social

inequalities" (Villegas & Lucas, p. 50) which Villegas and Lucas stress in their

discussion of curriculum. This expansive vision of Villegas and Lucas's definition

helps us see how a range of scholarly work in curriculum studies can help us

understand different elements of the curriculum. For example, curriculum largely

represents the interests of the dominant group (Apple, 1990; Nieto, 1996). The

curriculum also perpetuates unequal social dynamics by minimizing or removing

"controversial topics" from discussion (Sleeter & Grant, 1991). The three elements I

focus on in this study are the written curriculum used for the course, the class lessons

Mr. Hanson conducted, and student reaction to their curriculum experience. These

three aspects emerged in my research as worthy of closer analysis because they

represent places in the curricula where the teacher has the most control over, and by

extension, the most power to change.

The Purpose of Geography Curriculum

The study of geography extends beyond landmass forms, climate graphs, and

maps. Geography education emphasizes five themes: location, region, place,

movement, and human/environment interaction.[17] Dewey (1916) perceives geography

education as the ability to relate physical geographical facts to social interactions and

then to discuss the consequences of this relationship. Fleming and Morrill (1982) argue

that the study of geography assumes that location matters, and, places are different for

specific reasons; Fleming and Morrill also contend that the physical environment

influences human behavior, settlement, and development. Morgan and Lambert (2001)

propose that the study of "places" helps create awareness of cultural diversity,

encourages students to develop an understanding of the global links between countries,

fosters a sense of interdependence between people and environments, and provides

context for social and cultural development. Kincheloe (2001) agrees, stating that it is

beneficial to students when the field of geography examines the "relationship between

the physical world and social, political, historical, cultural, and economic events" (p.

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[17] These five themes in geography education were used in the textbook, used throughout the class by Mr. Hanson, and were referenced in literature on geography curriculum. However, none of these sources provided an original citation for these themes.

674). Therefore, a geography-centered curriculum must include an analysis of the consequences of human-environment interaction, not only a physical perspective but also from a social and cultural perspective. Willinsky (1998) refers to this as creating a "critical space" where students position themselves away from the curriculum and "take issue with its inevitable and its readily avoidable limitations in peering into and rendering sensible the lives of others" (p. 155).

World geography education can offer unique insight into the concepts of "race" and culture by situating these concepts within the context of place, or location (Dwyer, 1999; Willinsky, 1998). Geography educators concerned with studying the concept of "race" (and by extension, racism) must deconstruct the role of geography education in perpetuating and legitimizing systems of oppression (Morgan & Lambert, 2001; Wilson, 1999). For example, when geography curriculum refers to Indigenous peoples as primitive and backwards, this perspective can influence how students perceive Indigenous students in their classrooms. Unfortunately, geography curriculum often offers "neutral" approaches to topics such as race, culture, and colonialism, missing the opportunity to provide a more critical analysis of the influence that these concepts have on the relationship between people and places (Morgan & Lambert). This neutrality reflects "the powerful argument that (perhaps more than most disciplines) Western geography has actually always been about Whiteness" (McGuiness, 2000, p. 229).

According to Gill (1999), the expansion of Britain as a world power in the 19th century corresponded with the emergence of world geography as an academic subject area in schools. Willinsky (1998) writes, "Geography was a discipline prepared to

serve the political economy of colonialism" (p. 142). This link between geography

curriculum and the colonialism Britain perpetuated meant "geography was bound up

with the history of racism and the exploitation of [non-White] people by White

[people] in a developing global economy" (Morgan & Lambert, 2001). Language

provides a good example: the common usage of the terms "first world" and "third

world" to describe countries, which treats only "first world" countries as normative,

highlights this reflected privileging of "Whiteness." Likewise, geographical research

and curriculum development reflects the Eurocentric White view of the world and

positions non-White views as the "Other."

The Exclusion of "Race" and Colonialism in Curriculum

As mentioned above, one of the more problematic aspects of world geography

curriculum is the exclusion of the concepts of race and colonialism. The exclusion

fosters an ideology of colorblindness and colonial blindness, which diminishes the role

of both the concept of race and the concept of colonialism contribute to the experiences

of Indigenous peoples globally.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) argues that colorblind racism replaces the more overt acts

of racism that occurred historically, such as lynching, laws restricting access for non-

White people, among other things. A colorblind ideology has four frames, often used

together to explain away racist practices and policies. Bonilla-Silva refers to the first

frame as "abstract liberalism." Within this frame, White people use liberal language to

refute the claims of systemic oppression. Within world geography curriculum, this

occurs when the curriculum obscures the structural inclusion of racist policies in the

ruling of colonized countries, and instead positions the status of developing countries as a result of their own ineffectiveness to lead; not as a result of racism or colonialism.

According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), the second frame is "naturalization," the belief that segregation occurs naturally because people generally prefer to live near certain people or areas over other people or areas. World geography curriculum commonly invokes this frame to explain the differences in racial populations across the world. For example, rather than acknowledge the economic and social factors that contribute to non-White populations gathering in urban centers, textbooks describe this concentration as the choice of communities.

The third frame of "colorblindness" is the use of cultural racism to explain differences between White and non-White populations. In this frame, individuals make sweeping generalizations about individuals, using "culture" as the reason for the disparity, such as the positioning Indigenous peoples as primitive and uneducated in order to explain their poor academic performance in schools. This occurs in world geography curriculum to explain the role of White "settlers" in "saving" non-White communities (Hong, 2009).

The final frame of "colorblindness" is the minimization of racism. This frame suggests that overt racism and discrimination no longer detrimentally affect non-White populations. While not explicitly addressed in world geography curriculum, the failure to acknowledge the role racism plays in human-environment interaction serves as the ultimate form of minimization: racism is so minimal that it does not exist. Morgan and Lambert (2001) point to the failure of geography curriculum to include the use of

racialization as a tool of exploitation. For example, textbooks often state that European countries invaded African countries because of the desire for material and economic wealth, omitting that European countries viewed African individuals as racially inferior.

Related to this use of "colorblindness" in the curriculum is the failure to acknowledge the role of colonialism in the oppression of people worldwide. One of the most challenging aspects of American Indian and Indigenous representation in the curriculum is the failure to address their experiences as one of colonization. Richardson (2012) writes

Colonial perspectives provided for both an acknowledgement of Indigenous socio-political difference, establishing a legal framework to recognize and address it, and a dismissal of such difference as based on primitiveness. This conflicted colonial perspective creates a contemporary situation in which the sovereignty and self determining powers of Native peoples might be acknowledged, but only as part of an earlier historical era (p. 467)

The process of colonization continues, however, to affect Indigenous communities globally, and this is not just a relic of previous eras. According to Calderón (2011), the exclusion of colonial perspectives creates "gaps that have concrete consequences for many communities that are not allowed full participation in educational knowledge production" (p. 108). For example, students never learn about the ongoing struggle for political, cultural, and economic sovereignty American Indians tribes endure.

Calderón (2011) considers this curricular exclusion representative of a larger dominant ideology she refers to as "colonial blind discourse." Building from Bonilla-Silva's (2001) work on the discourse of colorblind ideologies, colonial blind discourses normalize colonization as a "functional component of [Western] identity and nation-building" (Calderón, p. 111). For example, within education, colonial blind discourses often include American Indians in the conversations on minority rights in the U.S. However, as Wilkins (2002) writes, "tribal peoples, unlike any other groups in the United States are sovereign nations, not minority groups" (p. 47). Therefore, to represent Indigenous populations within the curriculum, it must include colonialism, in addition to racism, and demonstrate the link between the two concepts.

Theoretical Frameworks

I draw upon TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) to analyze the curriculum at Leaf Lake Middle School. While several scholars have analyzed curriculum through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Chandler, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2005), there is no scholarship using TribalCrit to analyze curriculum in mainstream public schools.

TribalCrit emerged from CRT as a way to theorize the experiences of American Indians as both a racialized and colonized population. Daniels (2011) argues that TribalCrit is relevant "because of the historical and current problems of colonization and domination…and its framework offers strong possibility as an analytical and practical tool for both teachers and researchers" (p. 216). TribalCrit provides an alternative perspective to current color and colonial blind perspectives present within the curriculum.

There are nine recognized tenets of TribalCrit. I use three of these in order to analyze the curriculum: tenets one, three, and five.[18] The first tenet states that colonization is endemic to society. I include this tenet because of the importance of recognizing the influence of colonialism when designing education opportunities for American Indian students. This does not deny the existence of racism as a factor in the experience of American Indians but instead acknowledges the importance of colonialism. The acceptance of colonization as a normal is so ingrained in society that many American Indians do recognize the replication of colonial perspectives in the curriculum.

The third tenet states that Indigenous peoples occupy a space that accounts for the both the politicized and racialized nature of indigenous identity. This tenet addresses the dual identity American Indian students hold as both a racialized and colonized person in the U.S. Schooling that is culturally responsive should acknowledges both of these identities. When schools ignore colonialism and believe only considering the concept of race in constructing culturally responsive schooling, it negates a large component of the American Indian experience.

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[18] The nine tenets of TribalCrit are: 1) Colonization is endemic to society; 2) U.S. policies toward Indigenous people are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and material gain; 3) Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the politicized and racialized natures of our identities; 4) Indigenous people have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification; 5) The concepts of knowledge, power, and culture take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens; 6) Governmental and educational policies towards Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goals of assimilation; 7) Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions of the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups; 8) Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory, and therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being; and 9) Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work toward social change. Brayboy (2005)

The fifth tenet states that the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an indigenous lens. American Indian students enter school spaces that presume American Indian perspectives are inferior to the dominant Western-centric curriculum. Yet, a key element of culturally responsive schooling is the inclusion of different worldviews in the curriculum. For instance, the world geography curriculum included ideas of culture, knowledge, and power, and provided an opportunity to apply American Indian perspectives to the discussion and analysis that occurred during the semester.

TribalCrit is an invaluable tool to use because it specifically addresses the uniqueness of American Indian identity and experiences. Within the lens of TribalCrit, schools become sites of struggle where "broader relations of power, domination and authority" (Grande, 2004, p. 6) manifest themselves. The curriculum represents one of these sites of struggle.

Methodology

This study of the curriculum occurred as part of a larger qualitative case study conducted on the experiences of American Indian students attending a mainstream middle school. I found that using ethnographic methods, such as observations "particularly useful in revealing the social and cultural politics involved in the use of curricular materials in the construction of school-based historical knowledge" (Wills, 2001, p. 45). In addition to observations of Mr. Hanson's teaching, I interviewed the students, took field notes, and collected curriculum documents. I found that these data sources yielded the greatest amount of information about the curriculum experiences of

the students in my study. I also completed all of the in-class and homework assignments while I conducted my research. I found that doing the lessons at the same time as the students gave me perspective on the topics and material they engaged with related to the curriculum.

Before discussing my study, I think it is important that I situate my identity within the research. As a member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, I identify as an American Indian. In many ways, I am both an insider/outsider to my study. Although my American Indian identity did not share the same level of salience as the identity of my participants, my experiences in mainstream schools mirrored their experience. This balancing act as an insider/outsider researcher ultimately benefitted my study. Recognition of this dynamic required me to make thoughtful, careful decisions about the research process including how I engaged with participants, how I analyzed the data, and ultimately, how I represent this research publicly.

Research Context

I conducted my research at Leaf Lake Middle School[19] during the 2011-2012 school year. Leaf Lake Middle School is a large building, located in the middle of the Leaf Lake School District. Leaf Lake School District is located in a town of approximately 5000 people in a Midwestern U.S. state. It is a rural community, which covers approximately ten square miles, located near the Leaf Lake American Indian reservation. At the time of my study, Leaf Lake Middle School had 305 students, with 92 students in the eighth grade. According to the demographic information provided by

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[19] All names and locations in this article are pseudonyms

the school, 10 eighth grade students identified as American Indian. I focused on

American Indian students in the eighth grade based on the conversations I had with

community and school gatekeepers. Through our conversations, I had learned that the

eighth grade students were most likely to participate and want to share their

perspectives on their experiences.[20]

Given the relationship between social studies education and the concepts of

race and culture, I focused on the classroom of Mr. John Hanson, a veteran social

studies teacher. Mr. Hanson was beloved by his students. Voted "best teacher" in the

middle school for three years in a row, it was obvious that students thought highly of

him. Other teachers respected Mr. Hanson, as they routinely sought his feedback and

advice about classroom issues. At the same time, the school administration viewed Mr.

Hanson as a renegade in that he did what he wanted in his classroom with little regard

for what others wanted.

Mr. Hanson was the only eighth grade social studies teacher. Therefore, he

taught all of my participants, although they were not in the same social studies class

period. The data used in this article comes from the social studies classes of my

participants—I do not include data from classes that did not include my participants.

Mr. Hanson also had complete autonomy over his curriculum and chose to focus his

social studies classes on world geography. According to Mr. Hanson, geography

education involves five themes: location, region, place, movement, and

human/environment interaction. World geography curriculum addresses the concepts

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[20] One adult surmised it was because the students would leave for the high school at the completion of my study.

of race and culture through the human-environment interaction theme. Mr. Hanson

emphasized this particular theme throughout my observation period.[21]

Data Collection

I collected data over a ten-week period, during the final quarter of the 2011-

2012 school year. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each student

participant, and one semi-structured interview with Mr. Hanson. Each interview lasted

between 25-60 minutes. I held informal conversation with each participant daily. All

the interviews were audio-recorded and I transcribed all the interviews. Once

transcribed, I provided each participant with a copy of his or her transcript to review

for accuracy. I recorded the contents of informal conversations in my field notebook.

I also conducted observations of Mr. Hanson's social studies classroom, school-

wide assemblies, and the hallway during passing period. I spent three to four days per

week at Leaf Lake Middle School. I based my observation schedule on Mr. Hanson's

schedule; he had additional responsibilities that removed him from the classroom on

certain days. On those days, I did not attend Leaf Lake Middle School. In total, I

observed Mr. Hanson's classroom for approximately 245 hours. Throughout my

observation period, I took field notes, which included Mr. Hanson's comments and

lessons, student participants' comments and questions, and my observations of student

behavior. I photographed any relevant material displayed on the chalkboard. After each

day, I typed out my field notes and verified the previous day's lesson with Mr. Hanson.

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[21] While some may feel that a World Geography course is not the best place to study the experiences of American Indian students, it is because it does address issues of race, culture, and sovereignty, which are key factors within American Indian communities.

In addition to the interviews and observations, I collected documents related to the curriculum. *Global Studies*, which was the official textbook of the course, two workbooks Mr. Hanson created on climate and geography, and the *Nystrom World Atlas*, a reference book students used frequently. I also collected in-class assignments, quizzes, and examples of homework assignments.

Data Analysis

Given that my study includes multiple variables such as the written curriculum, in-class content, and student reflections, I used several different tools to analyze what occurred in the classroom. To evaluate the written curriculum, I conducted a content analysis of the texts. This meant determining the topics, issues, or words relevant to my study, and then determining how often and in what context the text referred to those words (Hogben & Waterman, 1997; Hong, 2009; Macgillivay & Jennings, 2008; Wade, 1993). My content analysis included quantitative data in the form of the number of references to my selected phrases and topics. It also includes qualitative data in the form of a discussion of the context in which these words appeared.

To analyze the recitative part of the lessons, observations, and interviews with the students, I applied the structural coding technique to the interview transcripts and to my field notes. Structural coding "applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data" (Saldana, 2009, p. 66) based on the research questions. Using the different tenets of TribalCrit that served as my theoretical lenses, I developed codes based on those concepts. Those codes included the words "race," "racism," "colonialism," and "culture." An important part of the

coding process involved deciphering teacher commentary and examples for relevance to those code words.

<div align="center">**Findings**</div>

To analyze the curriculum experiences of the participants I bounded the curriculum in three different ways: written curriculum, in-class content, and student reflections.

Written Curriculum

There were four primary written texts used in the social studies classroom. The official textbook for the course was *Global Studies* (1997). *Global Studies* "is a book about the world's cultures" (p.xiv). The textbook has six units on the following regions: Africa, South and Southeast Asia, East Asia, Latin America and Canada, the Middle East, and Europe and Eurasia. Within each unit are chapters on economics, geography, politics, history, and culture. In addition to the textbook, Mr. Hanson produced two course packs. The first course pack focused on world geography. It was a compilation of Mr. Hanson's own material such as notes on geographic principles such as land mass structures, and exercises from other geography texts. The second course pack focused on climate principles and included similar material as the other course pack. The final written text used in the class was the *Nystrom World Atlas*.

To understand how the curriculum addressed the concept of race, culture, and colonialism, I conducted a content analysis of the written texts. Wade (1993) suggests researchers who use this type of analysis have clearly defined categories, and examine both the number of references and the context in which the categories appear in the

text. For my content analysis, I used the terms "race," "racism," and "colonialism."

Table 2 provides the number of times each phrase occurred within the specific text.

Table 2. Curriculum Content Analysis

	Global Studies	Nystrom World Atlas	Climate Course Pack	Geography Course Pack
Race	2	0	0	0
Racism	0	0	0	1
Colonialism	12	1	0	0

The most referenced term was "colonialism." *Global Studies* (1997) defined colonialism as the "policy for taking over foreign lands in order to exploit them economically" (p. 51). The text offered several reasons why colonialism occurred.

The first reason for colonialism was European countries' desire for access to material-rich African countries, noting that the advent of the Industrial Revolution meant countries needed unlimited raw materials to fuel their factories. Recognizing the abundance of these materials in African countries, European countries "took over" these lands to exploit financially (p. 51).

Second, *Global Studies* claimed a sense of national pride drove colonialism. European rulers felt that creating empires through colonization made their countries more powerful, both politically and economically. For example, by 1884 Belgium controlled a portion of Africa equal to the size of Western Europe. This "acquisition" turned Belgium into a wealthy and prestigious European country (pg. 51).

The third reason the text gave for colonialism was the growing military presence throughout Europe. Access and control over important trade routes was

essential to protect economic interests, therefore, European countries used the process of colonization to gain access to key seaports. European countries also used the materials found in the colonized countries to provide supplies to their navies.

Lastly, the fourth cause of colonialism was "the belief that westerners were superior to other people. Many Europeans looked down on traditional African culture. They held the belief that "Africans were backward and uncivilized" (p. 51). Therefore, it was the "duty" of Europeans to bring Western culture to Africa (and other non-White countries).

Global Studies did discuss the negative effects of colonialism. For example, when describing the defeat of the Zulus by the British, the text stated

> The Europeans viewed and treated African people as inferior, as people
>
> of little importance or value. They had little respect for African cultures
>
> or customs. Africans were often treated as second-class citizens in their
>
> own countries. In almost every African colony, some form of
>
> discrimination existed (p. 54).

 The text also detailed the economic exploitation committed by Europeans. Europeans used the resource-rich land for economic gain but did not fairly compensate the African workers, instead taxing Africans at high rates to support European colonization. Other negative effects included the loss of religious and cultural identity. European rule changed the perspective of Africans on tribal leadership and led many Africans to convert to Christianity.

The text, however, also devoted considerable space to the "positive" effects of colonialism. While the text acknowledged some developments initially favored colonial powers such as the creation of roads, railroads, and telegraph and telephone service, it also argued those developments played an important role in the development of African economies. Other positive effects of colonialism included the introduction of modern health practices, such as medicine, hospitals, and clinics, which "helped bring some of the terrible diseases that had killed so many Africans under control" (p. 54). The last "positive" effect the text discussed was the impact of colonial governments sending African individuals to European schools. While these schools reinforced hegemonic European beliefs, by attending these schools, Africans secured positions in the government and received job training.

The other terms I searched for only received one or two mentions. The only two references to the term "race" occurred in *Global Studies*. The first reference indicated that in South Africa, it was expected that people would choose a racial identification; the second occurred when discussing racial equality in South America. The term "racism" appeared once in the geography course pack. It referenced Black people moving to Northern states from the South because of challenges associated with racism and poverty.

In-Class Content

Another important component of the curriculum involved the teacher's comments and lessons. Most of Mr. Hanson's class comments and lessons aligned with

the color/colonial blind perspectives of concepts of race, culture, colonialism, and power relationships.

During class, Mr. Hanson offered very brief explanations when discussing concepts. For example, while going over climate maps, Mr. Hanson explained how different cities in India changed names:

> The city of Madras is now called Chennai and the city of Bombay is
> now called Mumbai, and Calcutta is now called Kolkata. Anyone know
> why they changed it? Who ruled India? In the 1960's [It was actually
> 1947] when India took it over from the British, they changed the names
> back. History lesson over.

Mr. Hanson never provided any context to the relationship between Britain and India, nor did he explain the significance of changing those names.

While explaining current events, Mr. Hanson asked the class if anyone knew what happened in Sudan. The following exchange occurred between Mr. Hanson and a White student in the class.

> Mr. Hanson: Who knew that Sudan split into two? Did you know that
> there is fighting in Sudan/South Sudan on where to draw the line. We
> didn't pay attention until the minority took control.
>
> Student: What's a minority, like us?
>
> Mr. Hanson: Yes, we are the minority. We're the smallest amount.

In this situation, Mr. Hanson did not address the difference between numeric minority and status minority. For example, while White people may be the numeric minority in

some locations, for example, in apartheid South Africa, they retain the status and privileges of the majority group. Mr. Hanson did not engage the students in a discussion over why people might form new countries, nor did he provide any reasons for the divide between Sudan and South Sudan.

Another example of this occurred when Mr. Hanson explained the concept of shoe production as an example of the global economy:

Your shoes are made in China, but pieces of shoes come from all over. [During this, Mr. Hanson pointed to each student in the class and assigned them a role in the shoe-making process—for example, one student sews the leather, another student makes laces.] Weird thing is that your products come from all over—this is the world economy. Here's the question. Why is this a long process? And why can we get these products for cheap? People get a certain amount of money for their part of the process. The more shoes he [laborer] produces, the more money he makes. For example, he might make seven cents per shoe. Who is making the profit? The company is. In order to sell the shoe (marketing, producing, shipping), the company must make a profit. But, look at how many people it's benefiting. Even though this man is making seventy cents a day, he can take that money to his village and buy a chicken. Your money to buy these shoes extends so far down, and helps so many. It's amazing. Everyone can feed themselves, even poor people.

Before introducing a slideshow on India, Mr. Hanson said, "I hope you are fascinated with toilets because you are about to see the world's biggest toilet." During an activity where students determined cities based on lines of longitude and latitude, Mr. Hanson said, "Baskarat, Iraq is where I'm located. Now it has taken the place of Tijuana as murder capital of the world. It's the ghetto with state-sponsored AK-47's." He then added, "Mexico's philosophy is killed or be killed." None of these comments offered insight or context to the lesson.

During one of the final classes, I walked into the classroom and found forty countries listed on the board with different colored stars by their names. Figure 1 shows a photo of the board. Mr. Hanson instructed the students to individually draw a world map and label it with the countries listed on the board. After students completed the activity, Mr. Hanson went around the room and asked students if they knew the significance of each country. He indicated that he designated each country with a different colored star: black, green, red, and blue. Countries with black stars by their names were most important countries. Blue-starred countries were countries most likely to be at war. According to Mr. Hanson, students would most likely hear about red-starred countries while in high school, and the green-starred countries were countries people would wonder about. I provide the comments Mr. Hanson made in Table 3.[22]

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[22] Mr. Hanson never clarified the significance or difference between "most important" countries, countries students would most likely "hear about while in high school," or countries who people would "wonder about."

Table 3: Important Countries of the World

Country	Comments
China	2nd world power
India	Population growth; Democracy
United States	
Indonesia	Doesn't care about U.S.; Allows Muslim fundamentalists
Brazil	2016 Olympics
Pakistan	Friends with U.S. until they lied about Osama Bin Laden
Bangladesh	Owes money to U.S.; 75% live in poverty
Nigeria	4th oil producing country; too corrupt to function
Russia	Ally and friend to the U.S.
Japan	Largest economy; Makes electronic goods
Mexico	Neighbor to the U.S.; Corrupt
Philippines	Allies to the U.S.; watch over Asia for the U.S.
Vietnam	Fought and lost a war there; Owe U.S. money
Germany	Top economy
Ethiopia	Famine relief; Need to buy items from U.S. to survive
Egypt	Democratic revolution
Iran	Fundamentalist people who do what they want; Refuse to listen to U.S.
Turkey	
Congo	Know this country because of the Kony controversy
France	
Thailand	
UK	
Italy	
Burma	Communist country; Causes lots of problems
South Africa	
South Korea	
Spain	
Ukraine	
Columbia	Drugs; Pushing Mexico to be interdependent on U.S. economy
Tanzania	
North Korea	Testing nuclear weapons
Venezuela	Largest oil producer in western hemisphere
Cuba	
Canada	
Afghanistan	
Uganda	Know this country because of the Kony controversy
Australia	
Iraq	At war
Saudi Arabia	Has oil
Syria	Social media revolution

Mr. Hanson did not discuss many of the countries on the board (including the U.S.).

When he did comment on countries, it was often in terms of their relationship to the

U.S. Mr. Hanson did not discuss any historical relationship between these countries; or

provide any current context for the ongoing situations he mentioned.

Student Perspectives

I also interviewed American Indian students for their perspectives on their

experiences in social studies class. During my interviews with students, I asked them to

discuss what they learned in social studies class about the topics of race and culture.

My participants, while sharing information about the curriculum I observed (world

geography, climate, and international relationships), also chose to share information

they learned about American Indians. The students shared that this curriculum had

occurred the semester prior to my observation period, and that it was not a unit in class,

but rather a series of lessons over the course of a month.[23] While their perspectives did

not completely address the curriculum covered during my observation period, these

perspectives did reflect their responses to the questions I asked regarding what they

learned in their class about the concepts of race and culture. I organized their responses

into two categories: history and culture/traditions.

A majority of their reflections involved the treatment of American Indians in

the curriculum. When learning about history, students reported learning general history

of American Indians as well as specific tribal history. For example, Gertie said most of

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[23] Based on my observations, it did not surprise me that Mr. Hanson deviated from his world geography curriculum to discuss other topics in the classroom.

her American Indian history involved learning about arrowheads and tools that ancient American Indians used in their daily living habits. Grace shared that she learned about "Christopher Columbus and how he founded the New World," which is where the American Indians lived. Other students reported learning about famous chiefs, such as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Geronimo. Freddy stated he learned that American Indians came from Asia. From this perspective, American Indian history features a series of events, unrelated to one another.

Students also learned about specific tribal history. According to Grace, "Well, Mr. Hanson talks about the lands, he talks about different tribes (not Leaf Lake), and he goes back to Oklahoma where there's many more American Indians, and he just gives us some history over and over." When I asked Grace if she learned about the history of the Leaf Lake Indian Tribe she replied they did not. In class, they discussed other tribes but not their own. Freddy did indicate he learned that American Indians "were forced to lose their religion and become American." When I asked Freddy if his teacher discussed why that occurred, he said they did not discuss it any further than saying American Indians lost their religion to become American. Lara also shared that she learned how American Indians had large populations "a long time ago but then over time those populations decreased." When I asked her why the populations decreased, she shared they never discussed that aspect in class.

The second thing students learned about American Indians was about their culture and traditions. Grace shared, "The only thing I learned in social studies, and that's the only class we talk about Native Americans, is how he talks about the land

and how we got our language and all the other things in our traditions." However, when I asked Grace if that referred to the traditions of the Leaf Lake tribe, she answered she learned nothing about Leaf Lake in social studies class. They instead learned about the traditions of Northern Plains and Southwestern American Indian tribes. During our interview, Lara told me, "I didn't learn really much of anything. Like we had, like, a class where we just discussed the culture of it [American Indians] and it was just the definition of it [American Indian culture] and Native Americans were on the list of groups of cultures we needed to know about." While the curriculum included American Indian perspectives, the information was scant and did not align with the tribal identification of the students in Leaf Lake Middle School. Throughout my interviews, students often used the word "them" to describe their learning on American Indian perspectives.

Students did report learning problematic aspects of American Indian culture. For example, Grace said she learned that American Indians lack control when it comes to alcohol:

> Ever since alcohol was introduced to Native Americans, they got a little
> out of control on it….well, back in the day when they were trading stuff
> and alcohol was introduced to them, they go out of control….and I
> guess, in school, I learned they [American Indians] are still out of
> control when it comes to alcohol.

Other aspects of culture included in the curriculum were harvest seasons, powwows, and different types of dwellings (such as teepees).

Similar to what students learned about American Indian history, the information

presented on cultures and traditions did not represent the experiences of the students at

the school. When I asked students what they felt should be included in the curriculum

about American Indian perspectives, students had several ideas. Freddy wanted a more

accurate representation of American Indians within the curriculum. He knew the

textbooks "were wrong about American Indians." Melita wanted teachers to share facts

about different tribes.

> That like probably that not all tribes have the same language. Like
>
> words can be different, can have different meanings than other words.
>
> And like, we don't live…most tribes don't live the same, don't live the
>
> same lifestyle. Like some tribes will be, could probably be like
>
> vegetarians and not eat meat. And other tribes could just hunt and that's
>
> it--they don't eat fruits or vegetables and another one could eat both and
>
> then so and then they would know that and then if a teacher asks them
>
> what do you know about them, what do you remember and they could
>
> say that instead of really thinking that since they just learned the basic
>
> facts about how they lived and how they dressed.

It was clear from their responses that students knew their curriculum lacked substantial

knowledge or awareness on American Indian perspectives. At the same time, students

seemed completely unaware of the concept of colonialism or how that related to race.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how educators address the concepts of race, culture, and colonialism in the curriculum. I argue that not only does the curriculum fail to address the concept of race adequately, the current curriculum reinforces notions of colonialism and White supremacy, thereby normalizing Whiteness, and presenting any perspective outside of Whiteness as the "Other."

Erasing the Concept of "Race"

Mr. Hanson repeatedly stressed the "human-environment interaction" geography theme during the class periods I observed. He emphasized population size, social organization, values, wealth, education, knowledge, and access to technology as important elements that influence how people view life, and, therefore, define the way people act. However, he missed several opportunities to acknowledge directly how the concept of race influences these elements of human-environment interaction. By failing to discuss how the concept of race may factor into human-environment interaction, Mr. Hanson erased it from the curriculum.

Recognizing the relationship between White hegemony and the justification of colonization (Brayboy, 2005) is crucial in developing an understanding of the American Indian experience. This requires acknowledging the existence of both White supremacy and the concept of race. The curriculum did little to stimulate critical thinking on the concept of race, because the concept of race was largely absent from the curriculum. None of the textbooks used in the class defined the concept of race or pointed out its relevance to the experiences of people. For example, when discussing

reasons for colonialism, *Global Studies* alluded to the belief that Europeans felt

superior to Africans. However, the book never addressed how colonizers used the

prevailing racist ideology of the time as justification for this belief. Throughout the

text, the concept of race was never used to describe conflicts between groups of people

or countries. There was one mention of race in relationship to the citizens of South

Africa and their integration, which the textbook argues lead to a stronger racial

"equality" in South Africa.

The erasure of the concept of race occurred during class discussion as well.

When Mr. Hanson discussed the world economy via the vignette on shoe production,

he had multiple opportunities to stimulate critical thinking about the role of race and

racial ideology in the world economy. By conceptualizing the world economy as a fair

process for all ("It's amazing. Everyone can feed themselves, even the poor"), students

never explored the relationship between Whiteness, the concept of race and the

exploitation of labor. Students did not explore the influence of the concept of race on

economic systems. In this vignette, every individual was supposedly equal.

By erasing the concept of race, both the curriculum and Mr. Hanson reinforce

ideas of White supremacy. Within the text, negative actions by "Europeans" (read:

White people) never outweighed the benefits colonizers brought to those they

colonized. The textbook included repeated references to Europeans creating advanced

systems of government, education, medicine, and infrastructure in efforts to "develop"

the colonized countries. This treatment sent a message of Whites-as-liberators;

essentially, non-White countries needed the assistance of White countries to become

viable and productive. There was rarely any acknowledgement of the successful

systems run by the original inhabitants of the colonized country. Whenever Mr.

Hanson made negative remarks about countries (such as "In Mexico it's kill or be

killed"), he directed those comments at countries with non-White majority populations.

Predominately-White countries received labels such as "friends" or "allies."

Normalizing Colonialism

Current social studies curriculum often supports and reinforces colonial-blind

discourses, which includes the dominant ideology that colonized groups benefit from

their colonization (Brayboy, 2005; Calderón, 2011). For American Indian students, this

issue is particularly relevant because many tribes are still involved in ongoing battles to

regain autonomy from the colonization of the U.S. government. Therefore, when the

curriculum and teacher normalize colonialism as a beneficial process, this does not

always resonate with the American Indian students in the class.

The text presented colonialism as a "next step" process. European countries,

seeking military, economic, and political gain "colonized" countries to serve this

expansion. Never did the text question the process of colonization, the purpose of

colonization, or the ideology behind the colonization process. Even when the text

described the harmful effects of colonization, it contextualized these effects as by-

products of the development of a larger, better, "stronger" system for both the

colonizers and those colonized.

Mr. Hanson normalized colonialism in several ways. During one exchange, he

mentioned offhand the relationship between the British and India, and the decision by

the Indian government to change the name of certain cities. Mr. Hanson added that this occurred "when India took it over from the British." However, Mr. Hanson did not discuss the political struggles the people of India endured to regain their independence from British rule, or acknowledge why the British controlled India in the first place. By not discussing this dynamic, Mr. Hanson insinuated that this was normal.

The second way Mr. Hanson normalized colonialist practices occurred during the "important countries" activity. While the textbook mostly referenced European colonization, Mr. Hanson's comments regarding the status of other countries had strong undertones of U.S. dominance and superiority within the world, the same undertones of the philosophy of dominance that led to the colonization of American Indians during the development of the U.S. For example, when discussing Indonesia, he stated "we" should control them because "they don't care about the U.S. and they allow Muslim fundamentalists." By "we," he meant the U.S. (and by extension, U.S. citizens). This supposition assumed not only that every student in the room identified as a U.S. citizen but it also privileged the ideology of the U.S. over that of other countries.

Additionally, Mr. Hanson's comments focused on the economic, material, and political relationship these countries have with the U.S. Much like historical colonizing ideologies, Mr. Hanson asserted that the role of other countries is to serve at the will of the U.S. He pointed out which countries owe the U.S. money and which countries are "allies" and "friends," versus which countries "refuse to listen to us." Through this activity, he maintained the position of the U.S. as superior to other countries.

Curriculum Inclusion/Exclusion

TribalCrit stresses the importance of recognizing tribal beliefs, customs, and practices. TribalCrit also "honors the adaptability of groups and recognizes the differences within individuals and in between people and groups" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 437). Curriculum reflecting these values recognizes the differences between tribes within the U.S., and it supports the inclusion of tribal knowledge in the classroom and curriculum. However, at Leaf Lake Middle School, the curriculum's treatment of American Indians' perspectives was one of inclusion/exclusion. Though the curriculum addressed topics related to American Indians, the information presented differed completely from the students' own experiences in many ways. The "inclusive" curriculum actually excluded participants' voices and perspectives. Students learned selective and out of context tribal history—but not their tribal history. Students learned about some general culture of American Indians, but it did not reflect the diversity of the groups categorized as "American Indians."

At the same time, the curriculum almost completely excluded any acknowledgment of the relationship between colonialism and racism and its influence to the experience of American Indians. The textbook only mentioned this relationship once in reference to the disease and war "settlers" brought to North American Indian communities. Despite the problematic nature of "cataloging" the experience of American Indians, the students themselves felt that having an accurate "catalog" provided to their classmates would have been better than the misinformation they received in class.

Culturally Responsive Schooling

In their call for culturally responsive schooling, Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue that teachers "must be prepared to teach a racially, ethnically, economically, and linguistically diverse student population" (p. xii), demonstrating their cultural responsiveness. If educators and administrators want to improve the academic experience for American Indian students by adhering to culturally responsive schooling techniques, the first step is evaluating the curriculum and teacher pedagogy for its cultural inclusion and responsiveness. Culturally responsive schooling is not school-subject dependent—teachers can include culturally relevant material in any class they teach. [24]

Scholars conceptualize culturally responsive schooling in different ways. Pewewardy and Hammer (2003) describe culturally responsive schooling as schooling that "builds a bridge between a child's home culture and the school to affect improved learning and school achievement" (p. 1). Belgarde, Mitchell, and Arquero (2002) define culturally responsive schooling as schooling that "generally validates the cultures and languages of students and allows them to become co-constructors of knowledge in the school setting" (p. 43). Ladson-Billings (1995) describes culturally relevant teaching as "the ability to develop students academically, willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or

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[24] While culturally responsive schooling has the potential to "bring" students into the curriculum, it can also be problematic in that it assumes students who identify one way share the same cultural perspective. As the debate on culturally responsive schooling continues in education, I plan to explore this further. At this time, culturally responsive schooling for American Indian students provides insights on elements missing from the curriculum, as well as why those missing elements are important for American Indian education.

critical consciousness" (p. 483). Culturally responsive schooling involves several elements of school culture including curriculum, pedagogy, school policy, student expectations, standards, assessment, teacher knowledge, and community involvement.

However, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) indicate that the current literature on culturally responsive schooling for American Indians does not include important topics such as sovereignty, racism, and epistemologies. They argue these elements are essential for the successful implementation of culturally responsive schooling for American Indian students. Brayboy (2005) argues that analysis of American Indian education must consider the sovereign status and self-determination goals of American Indian communities. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) argue that American Indian communities believe education offers, "not just empowerment as individuals but empowerment as bands, as tribes, as nations, and as people" (p.3). While Mr. Hanson's emphasis on world geography did not directly relate to American Indian communities in the U.S., his curriculum did allow for multiple discussions on the topic of sovereignty and colonialism. To make the topic more relevant, Mr. Hanson could draw parallels between the issues of sovereignty experienced by colonized countries in Africa and Asia, with the challenges of sovereignty experienced by American Indian tribes in the U.S.

Castagno and Brayboy (2008) also argue that schools deemphasize the role of racism, which they believe is critically important for American Indian students to learn about in school. Mr. Hanson never mentioned how the ideology of race and racism influenced world geography. His erasure of race from his lessons and course materials

normalized Whiteness—this normalization serves as a form of racism toward non-White students in the course and does not support culturally responsive schooling ideology.

Lastly, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argue that the current research on culturally responsive schooling does not include the epistemologies of American Indian communities. American Indian epistemologies often differ from mainstream epistemologies in several ways. American Indian worldview emphasizes bigger picture meaning making (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). American Indian epistemologies consider the connections between living beings and the natural world central to understanding the world (Klug & Whitfield, 2003). Another difference in epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge. Rhodes (1994) argues Americans see knowledge as available for everyone to use, whereas American Indians feel knowledge has specifically designated uses. However, Battiste (2002) cautions against setting up a dichotomy between American Indian epistemologies and mainstream epistemologies, noting that American Indian knowledge "fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship" (p.5). Integrating American Indian epistemologies in the development of culturally relevant schooling is important because it "creates a new, balanced centre and a fresh vantage point from which to analyze Eurocentric education and its pedagogies" (Battiste, p. 5). American Indian epistemological views align with the human-environment interaction theme Mr. Hanson emphasized. The curriculum, however, reflected only a Western-centric viewpoint. When creating opportunities to

discuss different worldviews, such as during the "important countries" activity, Mr. Hanson reinforced Western hegemonic beliefs.

Conclusion

Teaching is not an exact science. Many factors influence the decision-making process undertaken by teachers regarding the curriculum. Initial lesson plans may change depending on current events, student learning outcomes, and classroom interactions, among other things. One of the limitations of my study was that I only studied the curriculum for the last quarter. The teacher also had no structure to his curriculum, making it hard for me to prepare or understand how concepts connected to one another.

Despite this, my study does provide important insights into the role of curriculum and teacher pedagogy in creating culturally responsive schooling practices for American Indian students. As identified earlier, culturally responsive schooling for American Indians argues for the inclusion of racism, sovereignty, and tribal epistemologies in the curriculum. The curriculum in this study does not address race or racism. In fact, it erases both race and racism from the curriculum entirely by not acknowledging how the concept of race influences things like economics or nation-state relationships. If a critical element of the American Indian experience in education is recognizing the position of American Indian students as both racialized and colonized, erasing any discussion of race from the curriculum creates a schooling space unresponsive to the needs of American Indian students.

The curriculum also fails to address colonialism. While the failure to address race and racism affects all non-White students in the class, not acknowledging the role of colonialism ignores the dual positionality held by American Indian students as both colonized and racialized in the US. Likewise, culturally responsive schooling for American Indian students requires the inclusion of sovereignty issues in the curriculum, which directly links to the colonialist practices of the U.S. government toward American Indian tribes. Treating colonialism as non-existent in the curriculum does not acknowledge how endemic colonialism is within society, ignores the calls to challenge colonialist ideology, and perpetuates social inequalities.

Current calls for culturally responsive schooling argue for the inclusion of student's culture and worldview in the curriculum. However, for American Indian students, culturally responsive schooling goes beyond including "just" information on American Indian students. With over 560 recognized tribes, it is difficult to include information on all those tribes. However, if schools do not take the time to learn and include the specific tribal history and culture from the students in their classrooms it might as well be non-existent. If knowledge takes on different meanings based on one's American Indian identity, it reasons that teachers should make sure they know which worldview students use.

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CHAPTER 4: CENTERING THE AMERICAN INDIAN EXPERIENCE IN THE RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION OF AMERICAN INDIAN YOUTH

A paper to be submitted to *Journal of American Indian Education*

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Gloria Ladson-Billings, in her 2006 presidential address to the American Educational Research Association, stated that research in education should move away from its emphasis on the "achievement gap," identified through the disparities in standardized test scores, and move toward research focused on reducing the "educational debt" (p. 3). Ladson-Billings argues that the "historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society" (p. 5) created this educational debt, which refers to the cumulative influence of educational inequalities related to funding, resources, access, curricula, and teachers, among other things. The debt Ladson-Billings refers to exists in the American Indian community through the legacy of boarding schools, forced assimilation, lack of support for American Indian education initiatives, exclusion from educational decision-making, lack of representation in schools, and low levels of educational attainment.[25] Educational research is one way to reduce this debt.

Due to this educational debt, conducting research on and within American Indian communities is often a complicated process because of the tenuous trust that

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[25] There is an ongoing debate regarding which term to use to describe Indigenous people in the U.S. I choose to use the term "American Indian" because it reflects my familial and tribal heritage. The terminology used when discussing specific scholarship reflects those specific authors and their designations. For more information on the discussion on terminology, see Fleming (2006), Wilkins (2011), Yellow Bird (1998).

exists between American Indian communities and the non-American Indian research

community (Crazy Bull, 1997). According to the report, *Our Voices, Our Vision:*

American Indians Speak Out for Educational Excellence (College Board, 1989),

previous research conducted within American Indian communities inflicted great

damage on those communities:

> Just as the exploitation of American Indian land and resources is of
>
> value to corporate America, research and publishing is valuable to non-
>
> Indian scholars. As a result of racism, greed, and distorted perceptions
>
> of native realities, Indian culture as an economic commodity has been
>
> exploited by the dominant society with considerable damage to Indian
>
> people. Tribal people need to safeguard the borders of their cultural
>
> domains against research and publishing incursions (p. 6).

Deyhle and Swisher (1997) argue that historically, education research in American

Indian populations treated American Indians as "problems to solve" (p. 115). The first

studies conducted on American Indians in education occurred during the initial

attempts to educate American Indians during colonial times (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

Unfortunately, the research conducted today continues to focus on assimilationist

practices and strategies, such as research emphasizing the need for American Indian

students to "accept" and "model" the culture of mainstream school spaces.

A recent research project studying American Indian student experiences in a

mainstream school led me to reflect more on these issues, especially the theoretical

lenses researchers have historically used when studying American Indian education and

the broader purpose(s) of conducting research in American Indian communities.[26] This essay is organized into five parts. First, I offer an overview of my research project and my reasons for conducting this work. Second, I provide a brief overview of the history of educational research in American Indian communities. Third, I focus on the four prominent theoretical perspectives—cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, interactionist theory, transculturation theory—that researchers have used when studying American Indian education. Fourth, I introduce two recent theoretical frames—Red Pedagogy and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit)—that I draw from in my own research. Fifth, I discuss the theoretical directions I feel research on American Indian education should take, as well as how this connects to our thinking about the purpose(s) of educational research in American Indian communities.

Entering the Conversation on American Indian Education

I joined the conversation on American Indian education years ago when I entered a mainstream school as an American Indian student. My K-12 schooling experiences profoundly influenced almost all of the decisions I made regarding my experiences in college and graduate school, including the decision to conduct my dissertation research on the experiences of American Indian middle school students attending a mainstream school. Currently, much of the research conducted on American Indian students in K-12 occurs in tribally controlled schools. What little

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[26] The literature on American Indian education applies the term "mainstream" to state controlled schools to designate the difference between tribally controlled schools and state controlled schools. This delineation is significant because it acknowledges that tribally controlled schools operate as a function of the sovereign nation status held by American Indian tribes in the U.S. While I use tribally controlled schools to refer to both tribally controlled schools and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, a distinction exists between them. For more information, please see Reyhner (1994) and Tippeconnic (2000).

research that does exist on the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream schools is quantitative in nature, applies mostly to college and university settings, and does not always transfer to K-12 student populations (e.g. Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Hermes, 2007; Manuelito, 2005). Yet, approximately 92% of American Indian students attend mainstream schools (National Indian Education Study, 2011). This disparity in research is why I felt compelled to study students attending these schools as opposed to tribal schools.

In the 2011-2012 school years, I conducted a qualitative case study on a group of American Indian eighth grade students attending a mainstream school in a rural community located in a Midwestern state. The participants in my study had the option to attend their tribally controlled school, but opted to enter the mainstream school system in the first grade. As I sat in on their social studies classes and had conversations with them about their experiences in school, I started to think about how my research connected to the larger conversation on research in American Indian education.

This article advances the argument that to counter the educational debt incurred by American Indian students we need purposeful research in American Indian communities that demonstrates a commitment to methodologies and methods rooted in American Indian knowledge and praxis and theoretical approaches that align with American Indian philosophies and worldviews.

Researching Education in American Indian Communities

A majority of research conducted on American Indian communities involves non-American Indian researchers (Struthers, 2001), and historically, this research has not been conducted in ways that respected American Indian participants or created purposeful research. Called "research poachers" (Ambler, 1997) scholars often used the experiences of American Indians only for professional and financial gain instead of using their findings to better support American Indian communities. Because White people had the power to define research in the field of education, including the goals, the research questions, and the methods, research on the experiences of American Indians has unfortunately reflected a White worldview, instead of coming from the subjectivities of American Indians' experiences (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Lomawaima, 2000).

The process of conducting research on the educational experiences of American Indian students began with the development of the off-reservation boarding school in the 1880s. Researchers studying the rate and degree of the assimilation techniques used in off-reservation boarding schools found that very few students assimilated into mainstream White culture (Lomawaima, 1994; McBeth, 1983). Beginning in the early 1900s, individuals who focused on solving what they saw as the Indian problem viewed the public education system as the best option for the assimilation process (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).[27] Historically, much of the research conducted on American Indian students focused on eight primary areas: intelligence/achievement

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[27] For a comprehensive discussion on the history of American Indian education and the boarding school experience, please see Adams (1995), Churchill (2004), Eagle (2010), and Hyer (1990).

testing (Coombs, Kron, Collister & Anderson, 1958), urban migration (Fuchs &

Havighurst, 1972), teachers (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972), parents (Harkins, 1968;

Parmee, 1968), cultural deprivation, language (Berry, 1968), stereotypes of American

Indians (Spindler & Spindler, 1958; Trimble, Goddard & Dinges, 1977), and schools

(Wolcott, 1984).

Prominent Research Theories in American Indian Education Research

There are four prominent theories found in American Indian educational

studies: cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, interactionalist

theory, and transculturation theory (Huffman, 2010). These theories first appeared in

the 1960s. I use Huffman's categorization of these theories since scholars conducting

research on American Indian education commonly refer to this categorization. In this

section, I provide a brief overview of the theory, its specific application to American

Indian education research, and provide the critiques of the theory that emerged from

the literature.

Cultural Discontinuity Theory

The first research theory is cultural discontinuity theory. Cultural discontinuity

theory emerged in the 1970s in response to cultural deprivation theory. Cultural

deprivation theory argued that the lack of academic achievement among poor people

(including poor minoritized people) was a result of intellectually deficient home

environments (Valencia, 2010). Arguing that it was educational institutions creating

barriers to academic success, scholars such as Hymes (1974) and Phillips (1983)

challenged the use of cultural deprivation theory to explain the academic struggles of

American Indian students. Cultural discontinuity theory argues that a possible

mismatch between a student's home culture and the school culture can lead to conflicts

and misunderstandings between teachers and students in schools.[28]

Cultural discontinuity theory is likely the most recognized and developed

theory in American Indian education studies (Huffman, 2010). This theory attributes

the problems and frustrations of American Indian students in mainstream schools to

mismatched cultural patterns, especially in the form of communication and interaction

styles because interaction patterns used in schools reflect White cultural practices and

are fundamentally different from interaction patterns used by American Indian

students. These differences hinder the academic achievement of American Indian

students. By extension, cultural discontinuity influences the student-teacher

relationship. If students do not communicate in ways recognized by their teacher,

misunderstandings arise. For example, when teachers ask questions in classrooms, the

expectation is for students to raise their hand immediately and respond. American

Indian students often engage in a period of reflection or "wait time" before responding

to the question (Little Soldier, 1997; Pewewardy, 2002). However, non-American

Indian teachers may interpret this wait time as disinterest or lack of understanding.

Another example of mismatched cultural practices involves the emphasis of

competition over collaboration. Oftentimes, American Indian students do not want to

stand out from their peers; therefore, class activities centered on competition do not

often motivate American Indian students to succeed. The cumulative effect of these

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[28] This theory is different from the literature on perceived cultural mismatches (e.g. "acting White"). For more information on this, please see Horvat and O'Connor (2006).

cultural conflicts contributes to the lack of educational persistence (Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Ward, 2005) because American Indian students cannot succeed if their teachers do not understand them and if they do not understand their teachers (Garrett, 1995).

Several scholars (Coladarci, 1983; Wilson, 1991) extend cultural discontinuity theory and argue that it applies more broadly than communication interaction patterns in the classroom. In Wilson's research, cultural discontinuity theory applies expansively to cultural conflicts in the classroom and school. Wilson argues that many American Indians systematically encounter the complexity of more sweeping cultural conflict beyond a mismatch in communication styles and patterns in the classroom. Examples of larger scale cultural conflict include students' frustration with American Indian misrepresentation in the curriculum, culturally insensitive educational approaches by the teacher, and preconceived ideas about American Indian students, which lead to low expectations of academic ability.

Critics of cultural discontinuity theory point out that despite its well-developed use in the study of American Indian education, it lacks empirical evidence to support the link between cultural incongruence and low levels of academic persistence among American Indian students (Ledlow, 1992). Brady (1996) criticizes this theory for failing to explain the relationship between socioeconomic status and school departure, varying patterns of school departure among communities, and the similarity in school experiences between American Indians who both persist and do not persist in mainstream schools.

Cultural discontinuity theory implies that American Indians students are more likely to be successful when their culture aligns closely with the culture of the teacher and school. However, other research (Deyhle, 1994; Huffman, 2008) suggests this is not the case, but rather suggests that American Indian students have greater likelihood of academic success when they maintain their traditional identity and culture.

Lastly, critics of cultural discontinuity theory argue that it mistakenly places emphasis on micro-level phenomena while ignoring the structural aspects of education that are problematic for American Indian students (Ledlow, 1992; Ogbu, 1982). Ogbu (1982) argues that culturally congruent instruction does not dismantle the structural conditions that deny economic and political opportunities to minoritized populations.

Structural Inequality Theory

The second research theory is structural inequality theory. Structural inequality theory is an umbrella term coined by Au (1993) to reflect scholars using conflict theory, cultural ecological theory or a combination of both to "focus on the educational problems associated with social inequality produced by societal arrangements" (Huffman, 2010, p. 72). Generally applied, structural inequality theory looks at the larger economic, social, historical, and political forces that shape the experiences of groups along the lines of class, gender, and race and ethnicity in the U.S. (Anyon, 2005; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Gottesman, 2013; Leonardo, 2009; Weiss, Jenkins, & Stich, 2009)

When applied to research on American Indian education settings, structural inequality theorists make three points. The first point is that historically produced

structural inequalities resulted in unfair and unequal educational opportunities for

American Indians. For example, years of assimilationist educational policies resulted in

fragmented schooling structures such as mission schools, off-reservation boarding

schools, and BIA schools, whose only purpose was the eradication of American Indian

culture. Coupled with the lack of funding for reservation schools and the persistent

belief in the inferiority of American Indian students, current school environments

cannot address the long-standing disparity in education (Ledlow, 1992; Ward, 2005).

The second point is that major structural institutions, such as education, serve

the interests and goals of the dominant group. For example, the curriculum used in

schools often reflects hegemonic, Eurocentric narratives. Culturally biased curriculum

(Van Hamme, 1996), racial stereotyping and prejudice in schools (Ambler, 1999), and

the overrepresentation of American Indian students in low ability groups (Van Hamme,

1996) exemplify how educational institutions serve the interests of the dominant group.

The third point is that American Indians often resist mainstream education

processes because they are suspicious of the education system based on previous

attempts to "educate" American Indian students (Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon,

1996). [29] While this resistance occurs at a micro-level, structural inequality theorists

argue the factors American Indians resist reflect structural conditions in education

(Huffman, 2010). This resistance to school-based discrimination and marginalization

takes many forms and ranges from passive action to ambivalence, to outward hostility

(Bowker, 1992; Coladarci, 1983; McAfee, 1997; Melchoir-Walsh, 1994; Sanders,

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[29] It is common for students today to have great-grandparents or grandparents who attended off-reservation boarding schools, and for them to share those experiences.

1987). Sometimes, American Indian students engage in resistance because they view academic success as cultural betrayal (Ogbu, 2003). Other times, their resistance functions as a coping mechanism in their current oppressive environment (Ogbu, 1987). Regardless of the reason for the resistance, it often leads to academic failure (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Critics of structural inequality theory argue it diminishes important cultural considerations (Peshkin, 1997). Structural inequality theory argues that educational disparity is a result of the relationship between schools and the interests of mainstream groups. However, American Indians do not possess the structural power to change the inherent structures in society. Linking academic failure to structural components fails to acknowledge the role American Indian culture and beliefs toward education play in the academic persistence of American Indian students (Peshkin, 1997). Miller Cleary and Peacock (1998) also argue that though educators must have an awareness of the continued perpetuation of inequality, educators must also address the needs of American Indian students now rather than wait for the rearrangement of societal structures.

Interactionalist Theory

The third research theory is interactionalist theory. Interactionalist theory serves as the framework for understanding students' early departure at the college level. Tinto (1982) first introduced interactionalist theory to explain why students leave college. Tinto describes a sequential, three-stage model of "separation," "transition," and "incorporation." During the "separation" stage, students extricate themselves from their

home communities. The second stage, "transition," recognizes the period of passage between home life and school life. In the "transition" phase, students may adopt new values, behaviors, and identities while letting go of others. The final stage is "incorporation." While Tinto admits he is unsure of how this stage unfolds, the assumption is that "incorporation" occurs when students consider themselves fully integrated into the institution of higher education. [30]

Huffman (2008) presents an alternative to Tinto's (1982) model, which offers different stages of transition to reflect American Indian identity. The first stage is "enhanced ethnic awareness." During this stage, American Indians are highly aware of their position on their college campuses as minoritized individuals, regardless of their previous level of assimilation into mainstream culture. Huffman labeled the second stage "culturally uncomplicated transition." For fully assimilated American Indian students, this means that their transition does not include any cultural conflicts. While Huffman does not address this, I believe non-assimilated American Indians experience this second stage as "culturally complicated transition." In this stage, American Indian students do experience cultural conflict in the form of culture shock. The final stage of Huffman's model is "active engagement." This most closely aligns with Tinto's final stage in that during this stage American Indian students actively participate in the social and academic structures of college.

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[30] Though its current theoretical usage focuses on understanding why students leave college, this theory helps to explain the types of transitions students encounter when they enter mainstream education spaces from traditional Native communities and how those transitions influence student integration in the school community.

While Tinto's (1982) original model fails to acknowledge that minoritized students might have different experiences than their White peers, other interactionalist theorists such as Taylor (2005) found that family background, personal attributes, precollege school experiences, family involvement, and strong identification with traditional American Indian culture all contribute to an American Indian student's ability to transition to in educational settings. This challenges previous research arguing that assimilation is the best path to academic success for American Indian students

Interactionalist theory also argues that academic persistence depends on successful social and academic integration. In order for this to occur, students must accept the prevailing values and norms of the college and commit themselves to the goals and procedures of the college. Scott (1986) found successful integration in college environments inversely correlated with attachment to American Indian culture, but Belgrade and Lore (2003) found it is possible for social and academic integration to occur when institutional attempts to integrate American Indian students reflected American Indian cultural traditions and practices.

A common critique of interactionalist theory is that it offers an assimilationist perspective to school integration. Academic success in Tinto's (1982) and Huffman's (2008) model requires students, at some level, to agree to participate in the mainstream structures and practices of colleges and universities. It suggests that weaker community ties assist students in their integration, despite some evidence that suggests stronger community ties are important for successful integration. Lastly, interactionalist theory

places the responsibility of integration on the student and does not address what schools should do to facilitate the integration process. By placing responsibility with the student and not with the institution, interactionalist theory ignores the challenges identified in structural inequality theory on education institutions and their reinforcement of dominant ideology.

Transculturation Theory

The fourth research paradigm is transculturation theory. Transculturation theory differs from the previous theories because it evolved specifically to explain why American Indian students persisted in mainstream education environments. Transculturation theory derived from Lewin's (1948) work on ethnic identity formation and the concept of symbolic interactionism. According to Charon (2001), symbolic interactionism holds that individuals are both rational and reflective beings, continually interpreting the meaning of social interaction with other people.

First conceptualized in the U.S. by Hallowell (1972), transculturation is the process in which individuals enter into a different social situation from that which they came, and so they come to participate in the customs, values, and cultures of the new social situation. Huffman (2008), building on Hallowell's work, defines transculturation as "the process by which an individual can enter and interact in the milieu of another culture without loss of the person's native cultural identity and ways" (p. 147). Therefore, the transculturation theory stipulates that American Indian students engage in the process of learning the mainstream culture found in education while retaining their sense of American Indian identity (Huffman, 2008).

There are two primary points of transculturation theory. The first point stipulates that strong cultural identity is essential to the transculturation process. Scholars argue that a strong sense of American Indian identity serves to anchor students culturally and emotionally (Huffman, 2010; Ogagaki, Helling, & Bingham, 2009; White Shield, 2004). American Indian students do not fear assimilation because they know who they are. Mainstream education does not threaten their sense of self, as they are aware of why they participate in mainstream education settings. Research suggests an important link between strong American Indian identity and positive educational outcomes. For example, Powers (2006) found that when schools offered programs that affirmed American Indian identity, American Indian students perceived the school to be safe, welcoming, and secure. Schiller and Gaseoma (1993) studied American Indian students at the college level and found that while the participants experienced a great deal of culture shock when they entered mainstream education, they pointed to their strong sense of American Indian identity as providing effective strategies to manage the conflict.

The second point of transculturation theory argues that transculturation results in a cultural process, rather than a product. Transculturation is a process of socialization. It is not the acceptance of an entirely new culture. In order for students to succeed in mainstream education, American Indian students must adapt to the cultural context and meaning of those school spaces. However, transculturation theory does not stipulate that American Indian students must relinquish components of their American Indian identity; their American Indian identity remains intact (Huffman, 2010). As a

socialization process, transculturation theory occurs over time and "attempts to give recognition to the resilience, integrity, and strength of minority cultures" (Huffman, 2010, p. 178).

One commonly noted problem with transculturation theory is that it assumes that American Indian students can engage with the mainstream educational culture. Unfortunately, the mainstream cultural setting of schools is often unwelcoming or blatantly hostile to American Indian students (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). Critics of transculturation theory argue it again places the responsibility of transition and involvement with the student, not with the system. Pidgeon (2008) argues that although transculturation theory offers insight into why students persist in or depart from mainstream education, transculturation theory still relies on students developing "strategies" to succeed in mainstream education. Lastly, it positions academic success relevant to mainstream academic standards. It does not take into account American Indian perspectives on academic success.

Alternative Perspectives on the American Indian Experience

The second set of theories, Red Pedagogy and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), are different from the traditional theories in that these theories are connected to broader political perspectives, which includes educational systems, but do not speak directly to daily experience of students in school settings. These theories argue that in order to understand the school system, we must take a step back and evaluate how education fits in the larger political structures at play in the U.S. In this section, I describe how each theory relates specifically to education. Given that these

are relatively new theoretical lenses, there are no robust critiques of these theories in the literature on American Indian education.[31]

Red Pedagogy

Red Pedagogy "operates at the crossroads of Western theory—specifically critical pedagogy—and indigenous knowledge" (Grande, 2004, p. 234). According to Grande (2004), "The trauma of struggling against colonialism in a postcolonial zeitgeist manifests most acutely in American Indian students" (p. 5). Educators working with American Indian students need approaches to schooling that emphasize the political nature of education, as well as strategies to challenge the colonialism present in the school environments. Grande offers Red Pedagogy as a space of engagement for these conversations. While not a specific methodology, Red Pedagogy provides insight into understanding the spaces American Indian students occupy.

In order to understand Red Pedagogy, it is important to recognize how schools impart colonial ideologies. Drawn from the work of Dreeban (1968), Smith (1992), there are five values rewarded in schools that reflect colonialist values. These values are independence, achievement, humanism, detachment from personal knowledge, and detachment from nature. In most classrooms, students work independently and only collaborate when specifically told to. The educational system encourages students to strive to achieve independence and an ability to work autonomously. The educational system values achievement only on its terms. Schools determine levels of achievement through impersonal measures applied to all students, such as grades or level of

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[31] There are critiques in the general conversation about critical race theories and critical pedagogies. However, these critiques are not germane to this discussion at this point.

participation. Schools also encourage students to accept secular humanism as an important aspect of the world. According to Grande (2004), students "are encouraged to believe that they are the masters of their own destinies, and that through technology and scientific inquiry nature's unknowns can become knowable" (p. 71). Schools also expect students to detach themselves from their personal knowledge. The knowledge presented as "truth" comes from textbooks and teachers, which often reflects colonial perspectives. Students' knowledge is insufficient within the context of schooling. Lastly, schools encourage detachment from nature. Students do not learn about their relationship with the environment or the influence of human interaction within the environment.

In response to the influence of colonialism, Grande (2004; 2008) argues for educators to approach the structure of schooling using the perspective of Red Pedagogy. Red Pedagogy encourages the following:

- For American Indians to work to maintain their distinctive position as members of sovereign nations while building coalitions with other sovereign nations in similar positions (p. 118)

- For the "personal to be political" where the politics are "deeply informed by the structures of colonialism and global capitalism" (p. 118).

- For the construction of self-determined spaces for American Indian intellectualism, recognizing the need for spaces where Indigenous scholars negotiate "a racist, sexist marketplace that aims to exploit the labor of "others" for capital gain" (p. 118).

- For American Indian students to have spaces to learn what being an American Indian means in today's society, "arming them with a critical analysis of the intersecting systems of domination and tools to navigate them" (p. 241).

The engagement with Red Pedagogy then requires educators to critically analyze the primarily Eurocentric processes and curricula of predominately White schools, to re-imagine an education system separate from its current colonial context, and to reintroduce Indigenous ways of knowing in the classroom, most importantly, the use of Indigenous languages. As Grande (2008) argues, "The project of decolonization not only demands students to acquire 'knowledge of the oppressor' but also the skills to negotiate and dismantle the implications of such knowledge" (p. 244).

The introduction of Red Pedagogy into the conversation on American Indian education is significant because it recognizes that American Indians have dual status as U.S. citizens and members of sovereign nations and argues that the failure to recognize this difference led to the disparity in educational achievement between American Indian students and their White peers. Red Pedagogy is about creating school spaces that empower American Indian students to move forward in the process of decolonization; not find ways to "fit" within the current structure of school.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

TribalCrit emerged from Critical Race Theory (CRT), a branch of legal theory that uses perspectival experiences to illustrate the role that the legal system has played in legitimizing the systemic oppression of non-Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Two common tenets provide the underpinnings for CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The first tenet requires understanding how White supremacy and its subordination of non-Whites created and maintained the United States of America. The second tenet centers on examining the relationship between this social structure and rules of law. Though CRT began as a movement within the critical legal studies school of jurisprudence, it has moved into other areas of academia, including education. Critical race scholars in education have "theorized, examined, and challenged the ways in which race and racism shape schooling structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004, p. 3).

While a global acknowledgment of the relationship between colonization and racism exists, Brayboy (2005) argues that current policies in the U.S. position American Indians as only racialized people and not colonized people, necessitating the need for TribalCrit. TribalCrit roots itself in "the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). Key components of TribalCrit theory include deconstructing the relationship between colonialism and sovereignty and recognizing knowledge as "the ability to recognize change, adapt, and move forward with change" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 434) which serves to move away from the White/Black binary CRT originally constructed.

TribalCrit promotes nine tenets to address the relationship between colonization and the experiences of American Indians in the U.S. The first tenet acknowledges the endemic nature of colonization in society, such as the ongoing regulation of tribal

identities by the federal government. Currently, the federal government requires "proof" of American Indian identity, provided through the certification of blood quantum: a process in which American Indian individuals show through genealogical charts "how much" American Indian blood they possess. This process does not serve American Indians, but instead, it allows the federal government to dictate which individuals may or may not receive government benefits by using this extremely flawed system of measurement.

The second tenet, building on the first, specifically identifies U.S. policies toward American Indians as "rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 431). To illustrate this tenet, consider the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This act authorized President Andrew Jackson to relocate American Indians to land designated by the government. Despite arguing that the Indian Removal Act gave American Indians autonomy to control their own land and establish their own government, its true purpose was to seize the land from American Indians at no cost to the government or the White colonizers. The government justified this removal because American Indians did not use the land in ways that aligned with White beliefs. The removal process, later named the *Trail of Tears*, led to the death of thousands of American Indians by disease, exposure, contamination, and a forced lack of preparation for such grueling wilderness travel.

The third tenet addresses the tension between the joint statuses of American Indians as both members of sovereign nations and as racialized individuals in the U.S. According to Brayboy (2005)

The racialized status of American Indians appears to be the main

emphasis of most members of U.S. society; this status ignores the

legal/political one, and is directly tied to notions of colonialism, because

larger society is unaware of the multiple statuses of Indigenous peoples

(p. 433).

While government policy does address the status of American Indians as a

political/legal group, it only does so with the tribes it chooses to recognize. Therefore,

there are still American Indians who do not share in this joint status because of a

government policy (or non-policy) of non-recognition.

The fourth tenet stresses the importance of self-determination, self-

identification, and tribal sovereignty. Self-determination is the rejection of the

guardian-ward relationship between the federal government and tribal nations.

Currently, the U.S. government "oversees" the administration of policies related to

tribal initiatives. Self-identification refers to the ability of groups to determine what it

means to be an American Indian. This is important in analyzing the relationship

American Indian students have with institutional structures.

The fifth tenet challenges the concepts of knowledge and power and argues for

alternative approaches to these concepts that reflect the worldview of American

Indians. TribalCrit addresses three types of knowledge: cultural, survival, and

academic (Brayboy, 2005). Cultural knowledge is composed of the traditions attached

to particular tribes. Survival knowledge is the information used to adapt and move

forward within the community. Academic knowledge is acquired from educational

institutions. American Indians use these multiple forms of knowledge to participate in

mainstream settings. Related to the nature of knowledge is the concept of power.

Power for American Indians relates directly to sovereignty. Therefore, TribalCrit

advocates for power structures led by American Indian principles and values.

The sixth tenet of TribalCrit is recognizing the assimilationist goals of

government and educational policies toward American Indians. From the arrival of the

colonizers, the U.S. government used education as the means to destroy American

Indian culture. The stated goal of education was the conversion of American Indians to

the practices, behaviors, and beliefs of European-Americans (Spring, 2013). TribalCrit

rejects these policies and any current educational policies that require American

Indians to assimilate in order to be successful in schools.

The seventh tenet emphasizes the importance of American Indian ways of

knowing as a tool of analysis for the experiences of American Indian students. Schools

often reward values and behaviors normed toward White American perspectives. One

such value is individualism. White teachers encourage students to work and participate

individually. Students answer questions by themselves and conduct a majority of their

work independently. However, American Indians often value community, and by

extension, collaboration. TribalCrit encourages educators to evaluate their curriculum,

policies, and practices to rid them of this exclusion and invalidation of American

Indian worldviews.

The eight tenet of TribalCrit acknowledges stories and oral histories as

legitimate sources of data and knowledge. However, mainstream educational

environments often devalue oral histories and privilege only empirically based research as valid. Teachers then sometimes view American Indian students using oral histories in class as deficient when compared to their White peers.

The ninth and final tenet of TribalCrit requires a connection between theory and practice. Scholars using TribalCrit must "expose structural inequalities and assimilatory processes and work toward debunking and deconstructing them" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 440). Related to this, any research conducted with American Indian individuals and communities must be directed by the community or address problems within the community.

Much like Red Pedagogy, TribalCrit is significant in the conversation on American Indian education because it recognizes the positionality of American Indian people as both colonized and racialized in the U.S. TribalCrit places the American Indian experience at the center and validates the inclusion of American Indian knowledge, worldviews, and values in educational spaces. TribalCrit also stresses the relationship between theory to practice, arguing that abstract ideas do not make change in real-life communities (Brayboy, 2005).

Comparing Red Pedagogy and Tribal Critical Race Theory

As I worked more closely with Red Pedagogy and TribalCrit, I found myself curious about the lack of cross-communication occurring in the work of Brayboy and Grande. Both theories argue that to address the challenges in American Indian communities, one must acknowledge the role of colonialism in creating and sustaining those challenges. Brayboy (2005) argues that colonization is endemic in society and

that "the goal, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, of interactions between the dominant U.S. society and American Indians has been to change ("colonize" or "civilize") us to be more like those who hold power in dominant society" (p. 430). Grande (2008) shares this sentiment and writes, "By virtue of living in the Whitestream world, indigenous scholars have no choice but to negotiate the forces of colonialism, to learn, understand, and converse in the grammar of empire as well as develop the skills to contest it" (p. 234). For both scholars, understanding the relationship between American Indian people and colonialism is critically important for those conducting research on American Indian communities.

While they share the similar inclusion of colonialism as an overarching factor in the American Indian experience, Red Pedagogy and TribalCrit do diverge from each other. Red Pedagogy and TribalCrit start from different places regarding the role of structural systems. Brayboy offers TribalCrit as a lens through which to determine where and how the structural system fails American Indian students, whereas Red Pedagogy calls for a total dismantling of the structural system. Grande's argument is that any structure created through colonialism will never serve American Indian students equally because "American Indian students do not enter a social space in which identities compete with equal power for legitimacy; rather, they are infused into a political terrain that presumes their inferiority" (Grande, 2004, p. 113). The only way for American Indians to achieve equity in school is through the decolonization process.

A secondary area of departure is types of "tools" both theories call to use in addressing the structural failures. TribalCrit offers strategies, such as accommodation,

to assist students in navigating the inconsistencies they might encounter in the education system. Brayboy also argues for practitioners to make the structural systems more understanding of the needs of American Indian students. Red Pedagogy takes a different approach. Grande (2008) argues that to address structural failures "teachers and students…must be willing to act as agents of transgression, posing critical questions and engaging in dangerous discourse" (p. 250). TribalCrit advocates working within the system, while Red Pedagogy advocates disrupting it.

Brayboy (2005) developed TribalCrit to recognize that the experiences of American Indian people differ from other groups because of the legacy of colonialism. Brayboy believes that evaluating the experiences of American Indians through the lenses of TribalCrit can expose inconsistencies in structural systems, such as school. Once aware of these inconsistencies, Brayboy argues that practitioners can then make "institutions of formal education more understandable to Indigenous students and Indigenous students more understandable to the institutions" (p. 441). Brayboy suggests there are two approaches to addressing this inconsistency issue. The first approach, assimilation, is highly problematic. Assimilation is "an act or series of policies that force those who are not like those in power to become more like them or to model themselves after the 'norm'" (p. 167). Brayboy, Castagno, and Maughan (2007) suggest accommodation as an alternative approach to assimilation. Accommodation occurs when American Indian students make the choice to adopt the values and behaviors they find most beneficial in school settings.

The emphasis in Red Pedagogy is not in understanding how colonialism influenced American Indian communities but rather in creating spaces for critical analysis of what Grande (2004) calls "intersecting systems of domination" (p. 118). In these systems, American Indians must not only "navigate the terrain of the academy but to theorize and negotiate a racist, sexist marketplace that aims to exploit the labor of signified "others" for capital gain" (Grande, p. 118). The recognition of colonialism is not the important element in the theory—what is important is the struggle for decolonization and the recognition that schools serve as sites for this struggle. If American Indian children are going to learn the "knowledge of the oppressor," fundamental to the battle for decolonization is providing the tools to navigate those systems of knowledge.

What Does This Mean for American Indian Students?

One of the most significant conversations taking place in the conversation on research in American Indian communities is the type of educational research theories and methods scholars studying American Indian students use moving forward.[32] Near the end of her presidential address, Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that future scholarship should address the educational debt because "it has implications for the kinds of lives we can live and the kind of education the society can expect for most of its children" (p. 9). To engage with the type of scholarship necessary to reduce the educational debt held by American Indian students, researchers must engage in

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[32] Another important conversation involves the type of guidelines researchers should use when conducting research in American Indian spaces. For more information on this conversation, see Lomawaima (2000).

purposeful research. Purposeful research in American Indian communities encompasses two things: a commitment to methodologies and methods rooted in American Indian knowledge and praxis and theoretical approaches that align with American Indian philosophies and worldviews.

Indigenous Methodologies

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) foundational work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* serves as the best articulation of the purpose of using Indigenous centered methods and methodologies in research: to reclaim, reformulate, and reconstitute what the process of colonization stripped. Colonization is the experience that separates American Indian students from other racialized groups in the U.S., thereby necessitating that educational theories on American Indian education address its influence. According to Smith, within this research agenda are 25 different projects pursued by scholars relevant to the experience of Indigenous people.[33] Research on the educational experiences of American Indian students fall within three of these projects: intervening, representing, and reframing.

The first project is *intervening*. Research focused on intervening is "designed around making structural and cultural changes" (Smith, 2012, p. 148). This research focuses on making structural changes to meet the needs of Indigenous people and not forcing Indigenous people to change to conform to the structural system. Disrupting the current educational structure is one of the most important reasons for new theories on

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[33] These are not specific research projects, but rather describe the purpose and goal of research within that frame.

the experiences of American Indian students, because research suggests that current educational structures do not serve American Indian students adequately.

The second project is *representing*. Research focused on representing is about "proposing solutions to the real-life dilemmas that indigenous communities confront, and trying to capture the complexities of being indigenous" (Smith, 2012, p. 152). Centering new educational theories on the perspectives of American Indian students indicates the importance of their representation within the conversation on addressing problems in education.

The third project is *reframing*. Previous attempts to research problems and issues in Indigenous communities framed those problems and issues using a non-Indigenous lens. This research takes control of that framing and introduces new ways to talk about these topics. This call for new theories seeks to reframe the current conversation on American Indian education to reflect the views and perspectives of American Indian students.

Smith (2012) argues that within indigenous research spaces, methodological debates are concerned with the broader goals and strategies of Indigenous research. By using these three frames, I am situating the need for new theories within the ongoing dialogue about the purpose and goals of research with Indigenous communities. This helps to ensure that research in Indigenous communities is "respectful, ethical, sympathetic, and useful" (Smith, 2012, p. 9).

New Theoretical Approaches

When conducting educational research in American Indian communities, it is important to use theoretical approaches that align with American Indian philosophies and worldviews. Red Pedagogy and TribalCrit push against the traditional research paradigms used, which emerged from theories that did not specifically address American Indian positionality. In 2000, Lomawaima, referencing the history of scholarly research on American Indian communities to represent domination and oppression rather than emancipation, wrote

> Despite that history—or perhaps more realistically because of it—many Native communities and schools accept the need for high-quality research guided by locally meaningful questions and concerns. We need more research on why and how children succeed; on how local Native control can be meaningfully implemented; on the results of implementing "culturally congruent" teaching pedagogies on curricula; on models of language maintenance and revival; on Native-language curricula; on community-based models of epistemology and community-defined structures of knowledge, and so on. We need more research in Indian education (p. 22).

Older theoretical paradigms typically applied to American Indian education focus on individual level experiences. Even structural inequality theory positions itself as the reason students act in certain ways within the school environment. For example, in response to inequality in school systems, American Indian students engage in acts of

resistance. The primary actor within this theory is the individual American Indian student. Red Pedagogy and TribalCrit, however, argue that the structure of school itself is the problem. If we know that the problems American Indian students encounter in schools are structural, then the theories we have used in the past miss the point and therefore can never totally resolve the problems encountered by American Indian students.

Grande (2008) argues, "Indigenous educators need to theorize the ways in which power and domination inform the processes and procedures of schooling and develop pedagogies that disrupt their effects" (p. 236). I agree with Grande that the educational experiences of American Indian students will not improve without massive structural changes that dismantle the system. At the same time, TribalCrit is still valuable because it offers excellent lenses to determine where the structural problems exist. Yes, the structure of education fails American Indian students; however, to address this failure we need to know how the structure fails these students. TribalCrit gives us a space to evaluate these structures.

If we are willing to acknowledge that the typical theories we use do not address the structural challenges raised by Red Pedagogy and TribalCrit, it is necessary to develop new theories to research the experience of American Indian students in mainstream schools. These theories, drawing from Red Pedagogy, TribalCrit, and the work of scholars studying Indigenous education internationally, must place the American Indian student at the center, recognizing the positionality of American Indian students as both colonized and racialized in the U.S. At the same time, these theories

would seek to disrupt the longstanding "educational debt" acquired by American

Indian students. These theories would not ask students to assimilate or accommodate

but would focus on creating spaces where American Indian students challenged the

legacy of colonialism in education. Almost an extension of culturally responsive

schooling, these theories would focus on the voices of American Indian students as

those best qualified to assess their schooling environment. As we think about this new

direction in research on the educational experiences of American Indian students, there

are other big questions to consider as well, such as the role of pan-Indian movements

and sovereignty in the educational sphere.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The objective of my research was to expand the conversation on the experiences of American Indian students, particularly those attending K-12 mainstream schools, in an effort to develop better support systems in schools for American Indian students. What began as traditional dissertation on the American Indian student experience eventually became three articles focused on the multiple perspectives present within my study on the American Indian student experience. The first perspective is the individual American Indian student experience in the school. The second perspective is both the written and verbal curriculum in the social studies classroom. The final perspective focuses on the role of educational research related to American Indian students. These perspectives provide insight into the needs of American Indian students attending mainstream schools and it is my hope that what comes from this research is renewed interest in the role of educational research in bettering the schooling experiences for American Indian students.

In the first article, I present the findings of my case study research on American Indian students who attend mainstream schools and how they experience the social and intellectual environment of school. I looked at three different elements of their experiences. First, I looked at how students made meaning of their American Indian identity in their school space. Second, I examined how students made meaning of their interactions with teachers and other students. Third, I analyzed the treatment of race and racism in the school environment.

What I found were two distinct components of participants' school experience: the experience of "being" an American Indian at school, and the experience of race and racism in the school space. The experience of "being" an American Indian was most salient to the students in the classroom and in their interactions with peers. American Indian students must constantly be aware of how they present their identities in schools and how that presentation influences their social location in school. Participants' engaged in ongoing negotiations related to what they should and should not share about their racial and cultural identity in school. Influencing these negotiations was their relationships with their peers, their relationship with the teacher, as well as their own reflections on being American Indian at school. For example, based on their experiences in the classroom, participants' indicated that they felt academic inferior to their White peers in the classroom. In addition to these feelings, participants' shared that fear of reprimand prevented them from participating in class in the same way their White peers participated. When combined, this created a space where American Indian students felt marginalized.

The experience of race and racism in school was very limited. Participants' viewed racism as the result of individual action, which prevented them from seeing how schools could perpetuate racism. This called into question the role of the school in teaching about racism. For a group of students likely to experience some form of systemic racism, not discussing it serves to remove it from the conversation. However, the lack of conversation on the topic does not mean it is absent from their school experience. All it means is that schools do not provide students with tools to

understand how race and racism influence their experiences within the context of school.

One way to introduce students to the topics of race and racism is through the curriculum. In the second article, I studied the curriculum and teacher pedagogy of an eighth grade social studies class. I focused primarily on the ways in which the concepts of race, culture, and colonialism are treated in the curriculum. I found that not only does the curriculum fail to address these concepts adequately, the current curriculum reinforces notions of colonialism and presents other perspectives outside Whiteness as the "Other."

Within the conversation on the schooling experiences of American Indian students is the call for more culturally responsive schooling. My study does provide important insights into the role of curriculum and teacher pedagogy in creating culturally responsive schooling practices for American Indian students. Culturally responsive schooling for American Indians argues for the inclusion of racism, sovereignty, and tribal epistemologies in the curriculum. The curriculum in this study does not address race or racism. In fact, it erases both race and racism from the curriculum entirely by not acknowledging how the concept of race influences things like economics or nation-state relationships. If a critical element of the American Indian experience in education is recognizing the position of American Indian students as both racialized and colonized, erasing any discussion of race from the curriculum creates a schooling space unresponsive to the needs of American Indian students.

The curriculum also fails to address colonialism. While the failure to address race and racism affects all non-White students in the class, not acknowledging the role of colonialism ignores the dual positionality held by American Indian students as both colonized and racialized in the US. Likewise, culturally responsive schooling for American Indian students requires the inclusion of sovereignty issues in the curriculum, which directly links to the colonialist practices of the U.S. government toward American Indian tribes. Treating colonialism as non-existent in the curriculum does not acknowledge how endemic colonialism is within society, ignores the calls to challenge colonialist ideology, and perpetuates social inequalities.

Current calls for culturally responsive schooling argue for the inclusion of student's culture and worldview in the curriculum. However, for American Indian students, culturally responsive schooling goes beyond including "just" information on American Indian students. With over 560 recognized tribes, it is difficult to include information on all those tribes. However, if schools do not take the time to learn and include the specific tribal history and culture from the students in their classrooms it might as well be non-existent. If knowledge takes on different meanings based on one's American Indian identity, it reasons that teachers should make sure they know which worldview students use.

The first two articles offer empirical evidence to illustrate the experiences of American Indian students in mainstream schools. Because of the empirical evidence, the third article is a reflection on the theoretical lenses researchers have historically used when studying American Indian education and the broader purpose of conducting

research in American Indian communities. This article advanced the argument that to counter the educational debt incurred by American Indian students we need purposeful research in American Indian communities that demonstrates a commitment to methodologies and methods rooted in American Indian knowledge and praxis as well as theoretical approaches that align with American Indian philosophies and worldviews.

Based on my research, I think it is necessary to develop new theories to research the experiences of American Indian students. These theories, drawing from Red Pedagogy and TribalCrit, must place the American Indian student at the center, recognizing the positionality of American Indian students as both colonized and racialized in the U.S. At the same time, these theories would seek to disrupt the longstanding "educational debt" acquired by American Indian students. These theories would not ask students to assimilate or accommodate but would focus on creating spaces where American Indian students challenged the legacy of colonialism in education. Almost an extension of culturally responsive schooling, these theories would focus on the voices of American Indian students as those best qualified to assess their schooling environment.

When I started my study, I think I subconsciously thought this research would offer insight into my own experiences in school—the disconnect I felt, the feelings of difference—but in the end, while I related to the research I conducted, this was not my story—it was the story of my participants. During my final interview with Freddy, as we wrapped up, he paused and asked if he could ask me a question. I agreed, and

Freddy said, "Was it like this when you were in school?" Ever the researcher, I asked him to clarify what he meant by "like this" even though I knew what he meant. He stopped for a second, and then said, "Like..did you know you were different, did people treat you differently…because I feel like I'm crazy all the time, like I don't know what's going on." I paused and shared that my school experiences were not like his for many reasons. Then firmly I told him that he was not crazy and that what he thought was going on probably was and that he did not cause it. He stood up, smiled, and said "thank you" in his native language. He then walked to the door, turned around and said, "Good luck."

As I wrote this dissertation, I thought about Freddy, Melita, Grace, Lara, and Gertie and the thousands of students who came before and will come after them. This study is my beginning contribution to increasing the equity in education for them. While oppressive practices toward American Indian students continue to occur, educators have the power to disrupt and dismantle the practices that inhibit American Indian students from participating equally in the school environment. The only way to influence the system is to change it—one student, one classroom, and one textbook at a time.

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