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Grounded in Relationships of Support: Indigenous Teacher Mentorship in the Rural West

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Cover Page Footnote

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Research Article

Grounded in Relationships of Support: Indigenous Teacher Mentorship in the Rural West

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This article explores the power of Indigenous teacher mentorship as essential to address “the change in point of view” long called for in Indigenous education. Drawing from a longitudinal, ethnographic study of an Indigenous teacher education program in a predominantly rural, high need region, we examine the basic questions: What do Indigenous master teachers uniquely bring to teacher education? In what ways do Indigenous master teachers support the development of socially, culturally, linguistically, and place-responsive teachers? Using the theoretical frameworks of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and situated learning, our findings elucidate the importance of Indigenous mentorship for re-membering and re-claiming Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies in relational and intergenerational learning—practices that interrupt coloniality in teacher education and school leadership. Discussion of Indigenous teacher mentorship centers the importance of relationships between people and place in teaching and learning and asks educators and school leaders to conceptualize Indigenous teacher education as a long-term project of tribal nation building and community wellbeing.

Indigenous peoples throughout America maintain complex and diverse traditions of relational, place-based, and experiential pedagogies through which young people are socialized into the knowledge, skills, and intergenerational responsibilities unique to their familial and communal roles (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Romero-Little, 2011; Stevens, 2021). However, two centuries of the U.S. federal government system and policies designed to “civilize” Indigenous children through schools frames the racist history of education that aimed to exert “control over the minds, bodies, and lands of Native children, peoples, and communities” (Hopkins, 2020, p. 3) and disconnect Indigenous peoples from their epistemologies. Throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries, Indigenous educators have struggled strategically, innovatively, and subversively to secure “the present and future well-being of their children and nations” (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020, p. 517) against extraordinary obstacles. Although erasure and colonization are no longer the explicit policy aims of education for Indigenous youth, the subjugation of Indigenous rights, cultures, knowledges, histories, and lived experiences remain a contemporary feature of schooling in the U.S. (Benally, 2019; Cummins &

Chang, 2020; Sabzalian, 2019). Indigenous educational experiences remain consistently summarized by the words of Lewis Merium and team in *The Problem of the Indian Administration* (1928), prepared nearly a century ago for the U.S.

Department of the Interior:

The most fundamental need in Indian education is a change in point of view. Whatever may have been the official governmental attitude, education for the Indian in the past has proceeded largely on the theory that it is necessary to remove the Indian child as far as possible from his home environment whereas the modern point of view in education and social work lays stress on upbringing in the natural setting of home and family life. The Indian educational enterprise is peculiarly in need of the kind of approach that recognizes this principle: that is, *less concerned with a conventional school system and more with the understanding of human beings* (p. 346).

Nearly one hundred years removed from the assessments of Merium and team, contemporary schools remain frontline battle grounds over Indigenous knowledge, identity, spirituality, language, and worldviews (Lomawaima & Brayboy,

2018). The need to nurture Indigenous youth as dynamic, whole people in relationship with unique cultural and physical landscapes is an urgent matter of teacher education and teacher leadership.

In this article, we explore the power of Indigenous master-novice teacher networks to address “the change in point of view” called for a century ago. Drawing from a longitudinal, ethnographic study of an Indigenous teacher education program that serves a predominantly rural, high need region, we examine the basic questions: *What do Indigenous master teachers uniquely bring to teacher education? In what ways do Indigenous master teachers support the development of socially, culturally, linguistically, and place-responsive teacher practices?* The theoretical frameworks of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005) and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) elucidate the significance of Indigenous mentorship for re-membering and re-claiming Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies in relational and intergenerational learning. Our findings and discussion of Indigenous teacher mentorship reveal ways in which Indigenous educators center community in learning, interrupt the legacies of racism in teacher education, and challenge the settler colonial construct of rurality. Lastly, findings call attention to the need for educators, administrators, and researchers to approach Indigenous teacher education as more than professionalization concerned with the conventions of schooling, but as foundational to Indigenous wellbeing and tribal nation building (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012).

Indigenous Teacher Education Is Nation Building

We believe Indigenous teacher education, pre-service and in-service, is an investment in tribal nation building (Anthony-Stevens, Mahfouz, & Bisbee, 2020; Brayboy, Solyom, & Castagno, 2014). By tribal nation building we are referring to “the political, legal, spiritual, educational, and economic processes by which Indigenous peoples build, create, and strengthen local capacity to address their educational, health, legal, economic, nutritional, relational, and spatial needs” (Brayboy & Sumida Huaman, 2016, p. 139). Professional programs that provide teacher education and teacher professional development can facilitate processes through which educators learn to attend to the health and well-being of tribal nations and communities, prioritize

communal needs, and foster intergenerational relationships. Applied to teacher apprenticeship and professional development, Native nation building through teacher education goes beyond preparing teachers to pass standardized licensure exams. It involves a concerted effort to support and nurture Indigenous educational leaders for community and school change. Indigenous educators who are grounded in community epistemologies, have become certified teachers, and are committed to building strategic alliances between school and community, are uniquely positioned to lead institutional practices which focus on the long-term goals of “strong communities, strong Nations, strong community members, and strong citizens” (Brayboy et al., 2014, p. 577). It is this intersection of educational leadership and strong nations that draws us to understanding the role of master-novice Indigenous teacher mentorship. We take up two primary theoretical lenses to help examine how Indigenous teacher apprenticeship is critical to preparing and sustaining Indigenous educators as nation builders.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) emphasizes that “colonization is endemic in society while also acknowledging the role played by racism” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). Grounded in the lived realities of Indigenous communities, ways of knowing, and tribal philosophies, TribalCrit consists of nine tenets that underscore the unique legal, political, and racialized identity category of Indigenous peoples in the U.S., TribalCrit’s tenets for understanding the educational experience of Indigenous peoples privileges Indigenous conceptualizations of culture, knowledge and power; they join story with theory and bring intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge and experience to the forefront as foundational sources of strength in tribal identities. Figure 1. outlines each of the nine tenets of Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005). Of importance to our research, tenet five problematizes Western/European concepts of culture, knowledge and power presented in teacher education: “European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society” (430) and disregard Indigenous knowledges as incapable “of meeting the productive needs of the modern world” (Battiste, 2002, quoted in Brayboy, 2005, 403). In the U.S., insidious

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

Figure One: Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), defined by Brayboy (2005)

coloniality pervades the foundational assumptions of teacher education (pre-service and in-service) and is apparent in the curriculum and assessments applied to marginalize and belittle Indigenous lives through schooling (Calderon & Urrieta, 2019; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Sabzalian, 2019). The struggle of Indigenous teachers to re-claim and re-view their cultural knowledge rooted in land and ancestral legacy is a struggle of power where teachers are swimming against a hundred-year-old institutional current to think with and through Indigenous cultural frameworks in schools. Power, as defined in TribalCrit “is the ability to survive rooted in the capacity to adapt and adjust to changing landscapes, times, ideas, circumstances, and situations” (435). The ways in which Indigenous educational leaders navigate schooling and support future Indigenous teachers in re-claiming and re-viewing Indigenous epistemologies embody deeply rooted sophistication and survivance and represent “a way of connecting theory and practice in deep and explicit ways such that [teachers] work towards social change” (440).

Socially Situated Learning

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of social practice for knowledge transfer—*Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*—theorizes the socially negotiated character of learning as meaning made through the actions of persons-in-activity. This theory places learning within historical processes,

where individuals are embedded in participatory activities that produce new knowledge, transforming and changing individuals as they learn. Indigenous communities have long histories of participatory learning structures that socialize young children into a community’s curriculum through “being there,” e.g., seeing, hearing, feeling as adults carry out essential responsibilities and community roles (Romero-Little, 2011). In the Pueblo world, for example, children are given “the best seat in house” for actively observing and listening-in on events and activities under the care of an older family member, such as a sibling or grandparent (Romero-Little, 2011). In the Yupaiq world, intergenerational teaching strongly emphasizes modeling, guided practice, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and hands-on learning, all within the context of authentic interaction with people and the natural world (Kawagley, 2006). Situated in-person-activity does not just reproduce skills but emphasizes how individuals learn complex social lessons about social relations, power dynamics, and identities through peripheral and gradually legitimized participation in community activity. Coming to understand socially appropriate interactions for learning, being able to identify one’s role within context, and learning what signifies maturity in the profession and in the community, are important elements for educators to become successful in their craft. Essentially, learning to be a competent teacher is not an exercise in the reproduction of existing knowledge/practice; it is a

dynamic process of becoming a person through participation and identity making in a community of practice (Wenger, 1999).

The unique nature of Indigenous knowledge, the enduring legacy of colonialism in schooling, and the lack of Indigenous representation across K-12 schools, makes salient the role of experienced Indigenous teachers mentoring novice Indigenous teachers. To support tribal nations and their citizens as they vision the past, present, and future of Indigenous well-being in schooling, educators, administrators, and policy makers need a better understanding of what Indigenous teachers find important for Native youth and how that knowledge is practiced in school spaces.

Place, Rurality, and Indigenous Teacher Education

The rural/urban spatial divide is a colonial concept (John & Ford, 2017). Shifting the center of gravity in Whitestream schooling (Grande, 2003) to Indigenous paradigms of education offers a nuanced framework to understand learning in relationship with place. Tewa scholar Greg Cajete (2004) states, “Indigenous people are people of place, and the nature of place is embedded in their language” (p. 46). Mohawk scholar Sandra Styres (2019) writes that “space is empty and abstract, whereas place is concrete, sensed, and grounded in lived experiences and realities” (p. 26). Styres further explains that Land, with a capital “L”, is more than geographic location but a primary teacher of intimate, sacred, and ancient knowledge. Yupiaq scholar Oscar Kawagley (2006) documented ways in which Yupaiq traditional knowledge reflects an understanding and relationship with the natural world based on a massive set of scientific experiments continuing over generations and through relations among humans and place. These Indigenous examples of knowledge relationships demonstrate ways of knowing, being, and living in relation to place, living and more than living beings, and “represent significant epistemological and ontological departures from those that have emerged in Western frames” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 51).

Much of the literature on rural education is framed by the concept of the “rural school problem,” a complex lens that more broadly situates “rural” as deficit: lacking cultural and economic capital, in poverty, lacking in quality teachers (Thier et al, 2021) and unsustainable in modernity (Biddle &

Azano, 2016). Scholars of rural education point out the ways this trend problematically presents rural contexts of education as less-than (Biddle & Azano, 2016) and positions rural ways of knowing, “non-standard local place-practices,” as problematic (Corbett, 2021, p. 236). Rurality additionally has racially coded meaning to imply White, such as “the real Americans”—i.e., people of European descent and Christian practice (Lichter, 2012)—which normalizes the erasure of people of color. Noted achievement disparities among rural youth of color compared to their White counterparts (Showater et al., 2017) form part of a complex social ecology that supports ideological detachment from the larger racial project of U.S. settler colonialism that maintains White supremacy across vast geographies (Calderon, 2014).

Ninety percent of Indigenous students attend public schools (Brayboy & Maaka, 2015) and nearly half of Indigenous students attend schools considered rural with high populations of Native students (NIES, 2015). Even when schools are located on sovereign tribal lands, within the historic homelands of specific Indigenous peoples, or attended by majority Indigenous students, schools remain associated with Whitestream cultural practices (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017; McCarty, 2002; Sabzalian, 2019). Research on rural teacher education featured in the leading rural education journals is relatively silent on the experiences of Native teachers, students, and/or the cultural, linguistic, and historic realities of tribal people¹. As a result, higher education and teacher professional programs remain ill-equipped to design and carry out mentorship programs that effectively recruit, nurture, and retain Indigenous educators in schools.

The invisibility of Indigenous people from rural education calls to attention the Eurocentric, settler colonial logic of capitalism present in spatial frames and identity. The epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies of Indigenous communities, peoples, and knowledge systems are deeply rooted in millennia of land and relational place-based knowledge systems. In the Indigenous world, place must be conceptualized as a partner in knowledge, as a source of power, and as a being to which humans exist in relational responsibility. Centering these Indigenous epistemologies in schools inherently pushes against colonial logics in education.

Recruiting and Retaining Indigenous Teachers in Indigenous-Serving Schools

When discussing racialization in rurality, the entanglements of settler colonialism, government mandated Eurocentric schooling, and tribal sovereignty are all central to understanding Indigenous educational experiences in the U.S. We must acknowledge that American Indians have sovereign political status and rights, distinct from any other racial minority group in this country. Within these rights, federal law states that providing culturally and linguistically responsive schooling to American Indian² youth is a treaty right granted through the US Federal government's trust responsibilities with Tribal Nations and their citizens (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001). Appallingly, Indigenous students across the U.S. lack access to socially, culturally, linguistically, and place-relevant instruction (Lee, 2015). Further, Indigenous students have few, if any, Indigenous teachers (Manuelito, 2004). Indigenous youth experience high rates of inappropriate tracking into special education, disproportionate disciplinary referrals, low teacher expectations, and high push-out rates, in schools both on and off sovereign tribal lands (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; McCarty, 2009; Sabzalian, 2019). These urgent inequities are acutely felt in rural and remote regions, where most schools serving high populations of Indigenous youth are located (NCES, 2015) and where teachers, even Indigenous teachers, have limited access to resources and professional development that address pedagogy at the intersections of culture, language, sovereignty, and geography.

Educational research calls attention to teacher shortages in rural settings, citing factors such as geographic isolation, inadequate professional development, lower salaries, and difficulty managing the multiplicity of roles expected in small schools (Monk, 2007; Oyen & Schweine, 2020). However, literature on teacher mentorship in rural, Indigenous-serving settings is sparse (Castagno, Smith, Kretzmann, & Davis, 2021).

Recruiting and retaining teachers of color is not a new discussion in teacher education (Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2019; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Native American identified teachers make up between .05-1% of the national teacher workforce and are higher represented in rural schools and schools with a more than three quarters of the student body qualifying for free and reduced lunch (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In "hard-to-staff" schools, a term generally applied to urban schools with large numbers of "poor and minority students," Native American teachers have the lowest retention rate (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010). Largely invisible in the literature are hard-to-staff schools with high populations of Native students. Given our experience in those schools, it is not uncommon to hear deficit depictions from the mouths of administration who struggle to fill teaching positions: "we just need a warm body and a pulse" (paraphrase of comments repeatedly heard by Vanessa and Iva). Broadly, where there is evidence of an overall shortage of teachers of color, schools are pushing out or losing teachers of color within five years at a rate fifty percent higher than White teachers (Ingersoll & Connor, 2009). Even as research states that intentional mentorship between and among teachers of color may significantly support teachers of color to remain in classrooms longer (Ahmad & Boser, 2014), outside of niche programs, such as grow your own programs (Gist, Bianco & Lynn, 2019; Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018), there is little movement in large-scale educational funding to redesign teacher mentorship to address systemic racism and settler colonialism in schools.

Teachers, teacher coaches, and educational leaders play a critical role in facilitating pedagogy that builds on and respects Indigenous social structures, cultural practices, and linguistic variations (Brayboy & Castagno, 2008; Castagno et al., 2015; Castagno, 2021; Cummins, 2020; Lipka, Sharp, Brenner, Yanez, & Sharp, 2005). Documentation of successful models of Indigenous teacher and educational leadership programs demonstrate the importance of teachers learning in direct relationship with place and within their home communities (Carpluk & Leonard, 2017), being deeply knowledgeable in their Indigenous language(s) (Alencastre & Kawai' ae' a, 2018; Marlow & Siekmann, 2013; Hale & Lockard, 2018) and building Indigenous values and pedagogies into existing curriculum (Cummins & Chang, 2020). Many such programs focus on teacher and teacher leader preparation but have limited resources to apply to induction and in-service teacher support. Even as teacher accreditation associations articulate guidelines on diversity and inclusion in national teaching standards, little to no required professional development is consistently available to pre- or in-service educators on the topics of designing or

applying Indigenous-centered teaching and learning nationwide (Campbell-Daniels, 2021; Castagno et al., 2015; Jojola, Lee, Alacantara, Belgrade, Bird, Lopez & Singer, 2011).

Context: The Development of An Indigenous Mentor Network Across Rural Geographies

Our research on Indigenous teacher mentorship takes place in the Western U.S. and is led by a public university in Idaho which is home to the Indigenous Knowledge for Effective Education Program. IKEEP was established in 2016 with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Indian Education to prepare, certify, and provide induction support for tribal citizens to become certified teachers. Regional tribal leaders cited concern with low numbers of Indigenous teachers, high teacher turn-over rates in schools with high populations of Native students, and a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy practiced in Native-serving school as evidence to prioritize an Indigenous teacher education initiative in the state (Jones, Anthony-Stevens, & Bisbee, 2018). In Idaho, like many rural Western states, the schools and districts that serve the highest percentages of American Indian youth are rural and rank among the lowest in standardized testing, high school graduation rates, and go-on rates to postsecondary education (Dearien, 2016). To date, IKEEP has supported eighteen scholars, nine of which have completed teacher education and/or are in their first years of in-service teaching. IKEEP scholars represent eleven different tribal nations spanning six states—Idaho, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Alaska.

Building a new program to serve a wide range of students (residential and distance) and degree pathways (undergraduate and graduate; elementary and secondary teacher certification) presented challenges which required strategic attention to institutional capacity. For example, at the inception of the project the host institution had no Indigenous faculty in tenure track or clinical roles. Additionally, the region had few certified K-12 Indigenous teachers and school leaders; and those present were frequently over-stretched leading transformative work at the local level. To build institutional capacity, IKEEP created a regional Indigenous teacher mentor network to support IKEEP scholars during degree completion and into induction years. IKEEP began recruiting master Indigenous teachers as mentors in 2017, through a formal application process. Mentors were

selected based on evidence of culturally responsive pedagogies, respect for Indigenous knowledge systems in schooling, and experience teaching in K-12 settings with high populations of Indigenous youth. Mentors were offered a stipend each semester for their time. IKEEP has maintained a cadre of seven master Indigenous teacher mentors. Mentors have joined from across the West (Wyoming, Washington, New Mexico, Idaho, and Nevada), bringing experiences from a variety of school contexts (public, Bureau of Indian Education, and independently operated) and teaching certifications in different content areas—math, special education, business education, social studies, and Indigenous language, and literacy. The group also represents a variety of educational roles—elementary teacher, secondary teacher, and school principal (see Table 1 in Methods section for mentor details). Five mentors have served since 2017, two left the network (one in 2019 and one in 2020 for personal reasons). Two new mentors joined in 2020 to make a cohort of seven at the time of this publication.

The IKEEP Indigenous teacher mentor network has gathered annually with pre-service and in-service scholars. Mentors support IKEEP scholars as a collective during group retreats and workshops, and directly as individuals, through distance relationships and in-person visits. Mentorship spans preservice education and in-service teaching. To date, four IKEEP scholars have worked directly under the supervision of mentor teachers, either as student teachers or newly certified teachers just beginning their careers.

Methods/Methodologies

The data used in this article are part of a longitudinal study of the development of Indigenous teacher education programs to serve predominantly rural, high need regions. With Institutional Review Board Approval, ethnographic documentation of IKEEP began in 2017. Grounded by the 4 Rs of critical Indigenous research methodologies (Brayboy et al., 2012)—respect, relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility—our research interests were driven by the needs and interests of our immediate audience: tribal leaders and Indigenous educators. Years of conversations and reflections with IKEEP graduates highlighted the salience of relationships among and between novice and master Indigenous teachers as a significant source of strength they brought with them into the classroom. Mentors also expressed a

multitude of ways the IKEEP mentor network benefited their professional growth and contributed vigor to their own teaching and leadership practice. These expert-novice relationships led by Indigenous practitioners also became of increasing interest to tribal leaders and other educators in our region. Listening to our audience, this portion of our data desired to understand how IKEEP mentor teachers embody leadership and what characterized their approach to leadership toward Indigenous educational change.

Social positioning impacts our perspectives and relationships in research. In doing this research, we aim to be critically reflective of researcher voice in ways that counter the historical subjugation of Indigenous and communities of color in research (Anthony-Stevens, 2017; Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Vanessa, Angela, and Rebekka identify as White, of European settler ancestry; Iva and Shawna are Indigenous, citizens of the Northern Arapaho and Coeur d'Alene tribes respectively. For all of us, this research occurred while we participated with IKEEP—as Principal Investigator and Director (Vanessa), program coordinators (Angela and Rebekka), and as graduate assistants also completing doctoral studies (Iva and Shawna). Iva has the unique role of serving as a mentor prior to and during her work as a graduate assistant. As a group, we are committed to researching relationships out of respect and care (McCarty & Alim, 2020), for each other and through on-going and reciprocal dialogues with IKEEP mentors and IKEEP students.

Data Collection

The specific data used in our analysis is drawn from the following sources: (1) fieldnotes of program activities involving scholars and mentors (2017-2021); (2) transcription of audio and video files of mentor retreats and professional development workshops (2020 and 2021); (3) transcriptions of individual and group interviews with seven teacher mentors (2020 and 2021). We took a critical collaborative action ethnography approach to data collection because multivocality in *doing* the work of preparing and mentoring teachers has always been at the core of IKEEP. By critical collaborative action ethnography, we mean that data collection involved power sharing and was purposeful to foster a “specific action-oriented tasks and desired outcomes” (Schensul & LeCompt, 2016, p. 4). After each IKEEP mentoring summit, professional development

session, or set of interviews, we worked as a team to study the data and understand how novice and master teachers constructed purposeful relationships in support of Native youth in and around schools. Our methodology included criticality as we were interested in asking questions and designing professional development experiences that elevate Indigenous representation, promote Native well-being, and disrupt coloniality in teacher education.

Participants

Most of the mentors featured in this research have been involved with IKEEP since 2017. Two joined in 2020. Five of seven mentors have participated in multiple interviews over two years. All seven mentors have attended and led numerous IKEEP professional development workshops since 2017, including annual mentor summits, monthly talking circles with IKEEP scholars throughout the academic semester, and one-on-one coaching sessions with scholars. As teachers and leaders from small communities, where people know each other well, we were cautious to encourage mentors to consider using pseudonyms in place of their own names in this research. Some chose to use pseudonyms, and some did not. We respected participants' choices and intentionally do not state who used a pseudonym and who did not.

Data Analysis

All individual and group interviews were conducted via phone or video conference platforms. Interviews were transcribed by the research team. Recordings of program activities, both in-person and virtual activities, were viewed individually by the research team and selected segments were transcribed for data coding. We used an open coding method (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) for review of interview transcriptions to look for descriptive, substantive themes across the data. Fieldnotes from mentor-student interactions and IKEEP mentor summits were reviewed to triangulate video and interview data. Coding occurred on shared documents over three to six months where each member of the research team contributed. After multiple rounds of coding and group discussion, we identified the theoretical lens of TribalCrit and situated learning to help us to visualize the nuanced and interactive relationship between our themes, in context and in relationship with each other (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). We arrived at four main themes that spoke to the unique features

Table 1
Mentor Profiles

Mentor	Tribal Affiliation	Role in Schools	Types of Schools worked in	Years in education
Iva	Northern Arapaho	Middle school /High school STEM teacher, culture teacher, math coach, Middle School math teacher, Title III Director	Public on reservation	15
Mike	Northern Arapaho	K-12 Special Education teacher, language teacher, sovereignty and culture teacher, Preschool Immersion teacher (tribal school), Girls’ basketball coach; Elected Board Member (BIE)	BIE, public on reservation, Tribal Immersion school	15
Lawrence	Pyramid Lake Paiute	High School Business Education/Technology teacher, Paiute language support teacher, K-12 principal, elementary principal, Elected Board Member (BIE)	Public off reservation, public on reservation; urban and rural	20
Lori	Spokane	Elementary teacher, middle school English teacher, Instructional coach, K-12 principal	Urban public, Tribal, public on reservation	15
Aniela	Cochiti/Kewa	6-12 th social studies teacher, student teacher supervisor, Director of Indian Education, Principal	Tribal, public off reservation, BIE	35
Trianna	Cochiti/Kewa	Early childhood teacher, school founder and director	Early childhood	15
Meredith	Snohomish	Elementary teacher	Public on reservation	5

mentors brought to apprenticing new Indigenous teachers: (1) Naming settler colonial logics; (2) We find each other; (3) Relational epistemologies; and (4) Community history honors sovereignty. We saw these themes as interrelated, but also as scaffolded. Naming settler colonialism, for example, was foundational for supporting the subsequent themes as it provided justification to prioritize the actions of themes two through four. We chose to organize the findings in ways that built upon one another to show the depth of how mentors performed, expressed, and embodied Indigenous leadership and nation building as educators and mentors. We took steps to ensure trustworthiness and transferability of data, including triangulation and direct member checking with mentors on our interpretations of selected quotes and their meaning.

There are, of course, limitations to this research. Like any knowledge production process, this work is situated in a specific social-historical context and cannot be generalized to all Indigenous educators, nor representative of the vast diversity of Indigenous peoples and perspectives involved in education. Our data set focuses on the narratives and actions of mentors and does not include the narratives and actions of mentees. Hence, our study reports on a slice of the complex ecosystem of IKEEP which

should be expanded in future research to include both mentee and mentor interactions and implications.

Importantly, this research provides insight into the constitution of a relational space for Indigenous epistemologies to lead and transform conversations of teacher apprenticeship broadly. Findings have implication for addressing the void in capacity building offered to educational leaders to support culturally responsive, sustaining, and revitalizing pedagogies in the classroom (Holmes & Young, 2018).

Findings

Naming Enduring Legacies of Colonialization

Mentors reminded us time and again, that coloniality is deeply embedded in schools. They engaged in consistent practices of naming and proposing disruptions to settler colonial logics in how teachers approach students, families, curriculum, and school policies. To name colonial legacies was a central and recurring feature of mentor presentations and workshops for pre-service and in-service teachers. As a feature of formal workshops, talk of “walking on eggshells” or being the “only Native teacher on staff” to recognize and call out racism and injustice toward Native students was a salient feature of everyday mentor talk. One mentor opened a three-

week workshop on community-centered curriculum design attended by thirty-five participants including Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and school leaders, with an orientation in anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) work. Trianna, an experienced early childhood educator and Indigenous language immersion teacher, led by challenging new teachers to understand the foundational importance of developing personal “understanding of what White Supremacy culture is”. Trianna asked all participants to commit to unpacking the nuanced ways White Supremacy shows up in everyday assumptions about teaching, learning, and schooling, “because we’ve all internalized it...and, if we’re not aware of it that, that’s when we commit...lateral violence”. Naming legacies of settler colonialism, such as Trianna did, was a starting point to open space for guiding teachers to re-think how they imagine and speak about youth and their families to value Indigenous beliefs and customs in intentional ways.

Mentors also modeled naming coloniality by troubling taken-for-granted practices in schools, such as high stakes testing. Mike, a special education, and Arapaho language teacher coached future teachers in small group dialogues to notice contradictions in schooling with regard to curriculum and assessment. “Look at the test scores, look at the test, are they developed for Indigenous people?” His simple reframing of “why aren’t Native kids doing better on standardized tests” to “the tests were not designed with Native people in mind,” was a precursor to his approach to coaching new teachers to ask critical questions about curriculum and the relationship Indigenous teachers have with their students. For Mike, a veteran teacher who pursued a teaching degree after working in youth summer programming and for his tribe’s water rights office, naming the normative assumptions about educational assessment as colonial impositions was a starting point to make space for students to develop and share their voices in the classroom.

Mentors regularly shared stories of the everyday challenges they faced in schools as they advocated for Native students. Mentors recounted experiencing everything from being called racist by White supervisors or peers when they directly addressing inequities in the treatment of Native youth, to having to withstand passive *and* aggressive resistance to their ideas for increased tribal community involvement from colleagues. These lessons were frequently laid out for novice Indigenous teachers in unromantic detail. Lawrence, a current school

principal who serves in his home community after fifteen years teaching in urban and reservation settings, supported the hire of a new IKEEP graduate into his rural Nevada district. He described seeing how racism shows up in Indian education as important for new Indigenous teachers to witness—“so they know what we are up against”. During the first weeks of the IKEEP graduate’s new teaching job, Lawrence, as principal, had to lead contentious conversations about instructional delivery during COVID. His rural public school district, which served an eighty percent Indigenous student population at the elementary level and a twenty percent Indigenous student population at the secondary level, allowed families to select from both face-to-face and distance learning during the pandemic. At the time, the local tribal nation was experiencing a spike in COVID cases and consequently, many Indigenous families chose to keep their children home. A majority White teaching staff at the secondary level selected a standardized, all on-line content delivery system for those who selected distance delivery. Lawrence, as principal of the elementary school and acting principal of the secondary school, challenged teachers and staff to consider how this on-line curriculum would equitably meet the needs of their Native students. Teachers openly called into question Native families’ commitments to their children’s education—“If those parents cared about their kids’ education, they would send them to school”. Lawrence was in a position where he had to push back against a majority White faculty and staff and he was keenly aware that this interaction was new to the recent IKEEP graduate hired in his district. The meeting brought out heated emotions and resulted in a small group of White teachers filing a formal grievance against Lawrence with the school board, citing he was racist for questioning their commitment to Native students. As a mentor, Lawrence described keeping an eye on his new hire during the heated interaction. He reflected on the importance of having a front row seat to “see and hear” how racism, a salient feature of colonialism is endemic in schools:

I’d like to think that [name of IKEEP scholar] will remember for a while, at least in terms of helping him grow as a professional in this field, because a lot went down in that short time that pretty much summarized, in a way, a lot of what I’ve experienced. Regardless of experience, regardless of how many years I’ve been [in education], I can think of a lot of times [where]

something similar occurred, whether directly or indirectly, when it came to just knowing something wasn't right. And being the only one in the room to sense that, and be able to speak on it, and speaking your truth (Lawrence, Interview, April 2021)

Like Lawrence, mentors voiced and demonstrated their commitment to demanding educational environments and curriculum which serve Native youth, knowing that they will be met with strong, sustained resistance. They regularly referenced the importance of having the tools to notice and call out settler legacies and racism as part of becoming an effective educator in Indigenous contexts.

Strength in Networks: We Find Each Other

All mentors saw Indigenous leadership as a critical aspect of practicing sovereignty in Native-serving schools. Mentors characterized educational leadership as a collective, made up of many voices from a variety of perspectives, including local communities and national networks. As contributors to strong Native nations, mentors modeled ways to bring their interests and desires into schools as stewards, not sole experts, in Native wellbeing.

Aniela, a veteran teacher and administrator of 35 years and recent retiree from a BIE school, emphasized how important it is for Indigenous serving schools to have “Indian input” to best serve their students. While BIE schools can use their sovereign status to hire Indigenous leaders, many do not. Mentors did not hide that it is rare for school boards to hire Indigenous administrators at all, and those who get hired have a hard time staying. The realities of school systems that regard Indigenous thought, knowledge, and power as incapable of meeting the productive needs of the modern world (Brayboy, 2005) maintains a scarcity of Indigenous leadership. Mentors illuminated what this feels like, in person, to be an Indigenous leader in hostile systems. They used terms such as “heavy,” “lonely,” and “scary” in association with school leadership. While naming these embodied truths, they simultaneously amplified the need to find and create spaces that bring Indigenous leaders together: “We find the four other people in the whole United States who are doing this work...we find each other and are connected somehow.” These efforts were not perceived as an individual choice, but as a responsibility to work on behalf of one’s community.

The power of creating spaces of Indigenous leadership was shared, modeled, and spoken about by mentors in ways that insisted on honest sharing of not-so-glamorous lived realities in leadership. Networking with other Indigenous leaders and educators, both local and across large distances, was a matter of Indigenous survival. Many mentors looked to IKEEP for momentary respite and inspiration to keep doing the challenging on-the-ground labor required of them in their local schools and districts. Iva, a veteran middle school teacher, characterized the mentor network as a revitalization of traditional friendships between tribes, “a network between the Plains tribes and the Southwest tribes and the Pacific Coast tribes” as important for Indigenous teacher trainees to witness. Aniela advised novice Indigenous teachers to seek out tools from other Indigenous leaders, yet not rely on other systems to lead local change. During a three-day mentor summit that brought together seven mentor teachers and fourteen IKEEP scholars—novice Indigenous teachers in the pre-service and induction stages of their professions, Aniela stated:

... support systems like [IKEEP] have been established, but they come and go. What we need is to ground this type of structured support [...] It can happen anywhere in the U.S. and the structure that I’ve seen evolve from IKEEP, it just makes a whole lot of sense. And you know, I’ll go back and share with my community. (Aniela, Mentor Summit, February 2020)

The words of Aniela, as a respected elder in the mentor network, highlighted the sense of reciprocity rooted in relationships and responsibilities that suggests individual teachers serve their nations and communities while also being responsible to seek out support from different perspectives and resources. Taking the tools and ideas home was always positioned as the end goal of inter-tribal networking.

Mentors described Indigenous leadership as multi-layered, storied, and extending far beyond just Indigenous school administrators. Lori, a school principal in her home community, framed leadership as a collaboration encouraging new teachers to see “lots of leaders in [the] building.” In discussions with new teachers and in reflective interviews, Lori described Indigenous teachers as bridges between tribal communities and schools in ways that honor tribal histories and support intergenerational growth beyond single classrooms or standardized achievement measures. Forming collectives, within communities and across communities, expanded

Indigenous zones of sovereignty (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2014) and modeled for new Indigenous educators ways to re-frame resources that help them co-exist in relationships knowledgeable about broad power dynamics and the desires of local contexts.

Relational Epistemologies

Mentors practiced being in relationship with community and place as central to Indigenous philosophies of learning. Talk of being a knowledgeable teacher, including curriculum and classroom management sessions, often began with mentors asking novice teachers questions like, “Do you know where your students come from?” and “Does your tribe have a creation story?” Mentors pointed out that creation stories are one of the first knowledges that Indigenous groups share with their members. These ancient knowledge systems, ontologically rooted in long relationships with place and histories of oral traditions, are the first example of how Indigenous communities apprentice new members to think of themselves, to know their role, and explore what is good (Brayboy & Maughn, 2009). Creation stories represent rich knowledge systems and anchor youth to kinship networks of belonging. They are also counternarratives in the assimilatory space of schooling.

Iva routinely models the centrality of Indigenous creation stories as roadmaps for human relationship with the earth through stories, in examples of lesson plans, and through student artifacts from math units designed from traditional Arapaho knowledge. The stories connect Indigenous people to their place on the planet and are the first relational knowledge that is shared, setting the stage for how knowledge should be shared and maintained in good relations.

The Arapaho creation story tells of a man floating on water. This man calls upon the animals for help, many birds respond and fail, the turtle then arrives to help and begins his dive in search of earth. The turtle is gone for a long time but resurfaces with mud packed into his shell around his neck. The man then takes this mud and throws it in the four directions to create the earth we know today (Anderson, 2001).

This story is meant to begin the relationship with the earth and the animals and begins the journey of understanding what it means to be Arapaho. This simple and short creation story is told and taught among the children of the Arapaho tribe. In the Arapaho tradition, the longer and more detailed

version of the story is reserved for older tribal members that participate in specific ceremonies. Knowing tribally specific knowledge systems that honor the rich nature of Indigenous education is much more than school textbooks and state standards. By beginning conversations about teaching through stories of creation that center relationship between people and place, mentors like Iva challenged the education = school paradigm (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Many mentors, especially those considered elders in the group, shared stories as a method of teacher apprenticeship, demonstrating how culturally rooted practices produce distinct orientations toward teaching and learning (Romero-Little, 2011) not to be distanced from the craft of school teaching, but embraced as a serious and important learning theory (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy, 2005). Both mentors and scholars described their extended time together as “story time” where oral knowledge lends proof to the listener that a lesson is being taught.

In addition to knowing the origins of knowledge foundational to community epistemologies, close relationships, unique to each teacher and learner, was privileged by mentors. IKEEP mentors rarely discussed what novice Indigenous teachers did not know, rather they asked questions to invite novice teachers to share their vision, strength, and purpose as educators. Such reflections were connective tissue between teachers, students, and context. “You have to know where a student is and what they need to figure out in order to help them grow,” was a common stance. Mike described this in his relationship with his K-12 students and related it to his work with Indigenous teacher mentees:

You have to live it and do it, walk the walk, to make those connections. How do you teach that? Well, you share a personal story with your students. You walk with people, not above, not below, with them (Mike, Professional Development Session, February 2021).

Relationality expressed and practiced by mentors valued context. Mentors shared lessons learned as they related to specific roles, places, and relationships within communities. These socially situated questions about worldviews and meeting students where they are is fundamental to how Indigenous mentors approach knowledge transmission, and determine what knowledge is appropriate where and for whom, based on culturally specific social norms such as gender, age, clan, and ability (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Aniela, the resident elder among

mentors, discussed the framework of her tribe's matrilineal system during an IKEEP mentor retreat. She explained how she was grounded by her mother and has a responsibility to relate to her adolescent students through her role as a mother and grandmother. This role was also practiced in IKEEP scholars' interactions with Aniela and modeled in the interactions between Aniela and her daughter Trianna (also a mentor). Lawrence, in his current role as a principal, also described how important it is for him to recognize his place within his Paiute community and among his colleagues in his school. As a male school leader, he has a responsibility to understand the matrilineal structure in his tribe, recognize and defer to the strength of female voices, and hold space for Paiute traditional relationships to "work themselves out" in school roles, such as curricular choices and culturally situated protocols for interpersonal collaborations. Speaking about and modeling relational epistemologies offered novice teachers numerous examples of how to work with their current or future students in wholistic and communal ways, and to see the relational sophistication in heritage knowledge systems from their respective tribes or from the tribes in the regions where they live and serve.

Teaching Community History Honors Sovereignty

For mentors, strong Indigenous youth need to understand the connection between tribal knowledge and history, and contemporary realities in school curriculum. Mentors described and modeled ways in which community-specific history was significant for community wellbeing and could not be excluded from classroom content. Community history involved enduring relationships with plants and animals, as well as histories of colonial disruption and continuing settler environmental devastation specific to tribal territories.

Meredith, an elementary school teacher, shared accounts of Native youth who attend primarily white schools being tokenized as "the Indian" or asked to play "the brown character" in school plays. Her greatest concern is that without access to accurate tribal histories, these respective students tend not to question why they are assigned these roles and have few advocates to help them question the assimilationist underpinnings in U.S. schooling. Mentors brought years of experience observing how Indigenous histories are erased, misrepresented, siloed, or tokenized in classroom environments.

Mentors' experiences as students, teachers, and parents, emphasized the need for curricular units to be built from and through local tribal histories to emphasize relationality and counter binaries and isolation. Iva frequently directed novice teachers to listen to students when they are awakened to their own histories. Her own STEM curriculum was guided by middle school students asking probing questions like, "why don't we get to learn about *us* in school?" with regard to their Arapaho history. Such community generated questions led Iva to make curricula choices such as using new technologies to graph tipi construction and drone technology to map remote sites significant to the Northern Arapaho. As advocates with their own examples, mentors provided novice teachers with detailed integrated curriculum examples, blending school subjects with cultural content. Hands-on, land-based, and collaborative lessons—such as harvesting buffalo, raising and releasing salmon, and mapping traditional homelands with drone technology—were units IKEEP mentors spent time developing and sharing with mentees and their colleagues. While challenging to achieve in school settings (often regarded as radical), mentors emphasized the need to teach tribal histories in multiple contexts throughout a circular conception of time, not as isolated events, or content segmented to a single subject, month, or week of the year.

Lawrence shared an example of his elementary students engaging critically with the lasting environmental impacts of colonialism in their community. In the region of his tribe in Nevada, the U.S. government maintains a Naval air base on tribal lands and as the government's lease of the land neared its end, toxic waste remained on and around cultural sites. 2nd-6th grade students in Lawrence's school studied summaries of the environmental impact statement, analyzed job descriptions for a tribal cultural guide who would assist with remediation, prepared to work with drone imaging of the area, and discussed the potential environmental and cultural impacts of the U.S. government renewing the lease and expanding the base. Students built skills in literacy, fluency, geography, science, and history while looking critically at the past, present and future implications of colonialism on their culture, lands, and community. Lawrence shared, "I'm so, so glad we have teachers here that have shown that ability and understanding of cultural relevancy for our kids" (interview, March 2021) while also modelling what is possible for teachers when leadership supports educators to leverage

Indigenous values and content-area standards. In multiple and varied ways, we saw mentors embody the importance of situating learning in the context of Indigenous place and history as a necessary component of honoring their students and tribal sovereignty. Teaching from community history reflects a notion in culturally responsive schooling which honor Indigenous peoples' deep roots to place, while simultaneously engaging with the dynamic life, context, and situations in which Indigenous communities practice their sovereignty today (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Discussion & Implications: Re-remembering and Re-claiming Indigenous Education in Schooling

Indigenous teacher mentorship in IKEEP facilitates learning exchanges where the interactions of designing and sharing pedagogical approaches enact refusals of settler colonialism and Indigenous erasure (Calderon, 2014) and assert Indigenous culturally based ways of being and doing (Barajas-Lopez & Bang, 2018). Indigenous mentors in this study modeled ways teachers can re-member and re-present community epistemologies in schools, not because state standards require this, but because communal and ancestral accountabilities demand this of Indigenous community members. Like the vision of Hopi teacher-scholars Garcia, Tenakhongva, and Honyout (2019), Indigenous mentors embodied knowing the self-in-relation to the location of knowledge, such as ceremonies, clan relations, and linguistic practices and included knowing histories of colonization as central to one's role as an educator of Indigenous youth. The salient aspects of mentorship in IKEEP involves apprenticeship through seeing, hearing, and learning in relation with place and relationship with other Indigenous people. Universities and schools normatively frame teaching as performative and linear with Western ways of knowing as the knowledge and history to be mastered in a decontextualized manner (Brayboy & Maughn, 2009). Indigenous teacher mentors in this research emphasized a parallel approach to teaching, one that centers learning around a set of relationships rooted in place, community well-being, and cultural survival. For novice Indigenous educators, having master teachers who are grounded in contextualized knowledge and savvy with regard to state standards and school policies provided them a both/and framework for visioning good and just teaching.

Similar to the model provided from the Diné Institute for Navajo Nation Educators (DINÉ), IKEEP mentors guided new Indigenous teachers through example after example that recognized and honored tribal knowledge systems as fundamental to teacher professional growth and to support curriculum development with and for their students (Castagno, 2021, paraphrased from pg. 328). Such sophisticated work should not be characterized as informal learning or oversimplified to be of use only with rural Indigenous students. Simple labels denigrate and marginalize Native knowledge and fail to accurately represent the full complexity of Indigenous knowledge which is abundant and complex (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Native students everywhere and their non-Native counterparts stand to gain when teachers reject binaries and silos and are enabled to engage learning in layered, complex, and socially relevant ways.

In their reflections of everyday work of supporting Indigenous youth in schools, we saw many examples of Indigenous teachers navigating systems that do little more than confirm the deeply inequitable history of schooling in the U.S. (Ladson Billings, 2006). IKEEP mentors uniquely offered a kind of anti-venom to these inequities through their language, relational networks, and approach to developing curriculum. Findings from our data amplify the power of solidarity between Indigenous educators and the importance of Indigenous leaders to name and practice healthy relationships between teachers, students, and communities. The change in point of view offered by Indigenous mentors in IKEEP inherently interrupts racism, as a logic of coloniality, and looks upon rural scarcity with a decolonial lens that privileges deep knowledge of and relationship with place. Our findings also contribute to recognition of the creativity, resilience, and innovation of Indigenous educational leaders to survive as individuals and nations through educational policies and practices aimed to eradicate American Indian populations (Faircloth & Teppeconnic, 2015).

Research on teacher leadership widely recognizes that quality teacher leadership is important for school improvement, higher levels of student achievement, and teacher retention (Cosenza, 2015). Additionally, research on supporting minoritized teachers to thrive strongly suggests intentional mentorship between and among teachers of color significantly supports teachers of color to remain in classrooms longer (Ahmad & Boser, 2014).

Yet, like seen in Castagno's (2021) research on the Navajo Teacher leadership institution DINE, "centering and building of teachers as leaders is not simply a move to improve schools or see gains in student achievement. It is a disruption of generations of colonizing ideologies and systems" (p. 327). Centering Indigenous mentorship is a more radical act of Native nation building that moves Indigenous-led teacher professional development into what Cummins and Chang (2020) call "dangerous leadership," e.g., an expression of uncompromising belief in the value of educational spaces rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. IKEEP mentors present a danger to conventional schooling in their ability to survive, adapt, and adjust to changing landscapes, while remaining grounded in context-specific relationships that thread curriculum, local histories, lands, and cultural practices through to the next generation. Uncompromising in forging self-determination in schooling, mentors practice their ways of knowing as pedagogies rooted in relationality practiced with, for, and by Indigenous peoples.

The wide-reaching IKEEP network of Indigenous instructional leaders highlights ways tribal nation building, as a framework, can travel across diverse geographies and function as conduit for preparing future teacher without forcing a standardized agenda. As other scholars Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2013) have noted, "Indigenous peoples have much to learn from each other regarding our efforts to mobilize to effectively change the educational system from one of acculturation, assimilation, isolation, and colonization to one that embraces the cultural and linguistic diversity of Indigenous students, their families, and communities" (p. 485). IKEEPs highly motivated, culturally responsive, and community centered cohort of master Indigenous teachers offers a model for how to mobilize change to colonial educational systems across geographic and cultural diversities without decoupling knowledge from its place-based and epistemological origins.

In closing, experienced Indigenous educators bring unique perspectives to apprenticing novice Indigenous teachers. Examining Indigenous-centric apprenticeship suspends damage-centered accounts of Indigenous educational failure (Tuck, 2009) and replaces failure with tribal nation building as a paradigm to map desire-centered futures. IKEEP master teacher mentors are part of broader intergenerational processes of context-specific capacity building which complicates and transcends rurality. Programs of teacher preparation that purport to prepare teachers to serve all children must consider how and in what ways they are equipping teacher leaders to adequately engage with the needs of Indigenous youth. Further, teacher education must consider how Indigenous learning theories and pedagogical innovation significantly contribute to frameworks for addressing local and global inequities. A focus on self-determination and tribal nation building in teaching grounds new Indigenous teachers in relational knowledge networks that enable Indigenous teachers to bring "their whole selves to their classrooms, re-learning their language, and knowing and living cultural traditions, knowledge, and stories" (Yazzie-Mintz, 2008, p. 91). This change in perspective is critical for Indigenous futures and the future of our global community.

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¹ We searched the archives of three rural journal data bases: *The Rural Educator* (TRE), *Journal of Research in Rural Education* (JRRE), and *Theory & Practice in Rural Education* (TPRE). Using the key words Indigenous, Native American, and American Indian, we found two articles in TPRE, three articles in JRRE, and 28 in TRE. However, with further filtering in TRE, we found those which featured Indigenous populations in the U.S. frequently only mentioned Native American populations as a demographic within a region (twelve). Five articles focused specifically on a case or study involving Indigenous peoples in the United States.

² We use the words American Indian, Indigenous, Native, Indian, and tribally specific names to refer to communities and individuals Indigenous to the Americas. We capitalize each of these words as they refer to a political status and identity comparable to nationalities.