

**Stories Into Practice: Understandings of Culturally Responsive ELA Curricula in an  
Indigenous Serving School**

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# **Stories Into Practice: Understandings of Culturally Relevant ELA Curricula in an Indigenous Serving School**

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Since the earliest days of United States colonial governance, research and discourse around Native American education, and the education of Native American, Indigenous, First Nations (NAI/FN) peoples has centered on deficit perspectives. Education has been a tool of assimilation by dominant forces intended to, “kill the Indian and save the man” (Reese, 2019). In recent decades, that deficit perspective has come to mean holding Indigenous populations to educational standards not created in relation to or with respect for their perspectives and contexts. In the last 30+ years, Indigenous communities have spoken out and have taken ownership of the education of their children. They have advocated for and implemented local knowledges and methodologies to make the instruction and pedagogies in their community more culturally relevant and appropriate (Lee & McCarty, 2017). This dissertation report is a case study of one of those communities that has worked toward educational independence while adhering to state and federal reporting and accountability guidelines. Through the creation of Culturally Relevant pedagogies and instructional materials, the teachers, staff, and administrators of North Mesa Elementary have taken local stories and applied them to English Language Arts instruction. By using local contexts, the teachers report stronger gains in school-based measures, as well as more positive educational outcomes that aren’t always measured or supported. The findings shared from this study shows the power that is created when a school and community come together to put their stories into practice.

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## Preface

The work contained in this study is rooted in my experiences as a brand new teacher in a small mountain town of New Mexico. I was ill equipped and unprepared to teach a classroom of Native American identifying students as I lacked the contexts and understandings of the current lived experiences. My knowledge of the community itself was lacking and that led to struggles on my part as an educator to reach my students. Through working with the town's cultural center and tribal elders, I began working towards developing English Language Arts curriculum that was more culturally relevant and appropriate for all students. Through this process, I began to understand that this type of learning would be a benefit to all students, regardless of identity.

I began work at the University of New Mexico on a degree which furthered my understanding of Indigenous concepts and how they can be applied to classroom-based learning as well as real world experiences. I am grateful to Dr. Christine Sims, Acoma, who was patient with me as I made sense of these new ways of knowing, and to Dr. Ann Calhoon who guided me through the process and encouraged my lines of inquiry allowing me to try out new ways of teaching and learning.

At the University of Pittsburgh where this study was conducted, this work was strengthened and guided by many faculty members of the School of Education, as well as the School of Social Work, the School of Computing and Information, and the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies. There are too many people to name and thank here, but I want to acknowledge their contributions to my understanding of the experiences of others and how I can and should use my position to lift their perspectives.

I would like to offer many thanks to my dissertation committee for their years of work helping to craft this study and bring it to completion despite the obstacles set before us with the ongoing global pandemic. Dr. Michelle Sobolak, Associate Professor and Director of Teacher and Professional Education. Dr. Mary Kay Biagini, Associate Professor, Chair of the Department of Information Culture and Data Stewardship and Director of the School Library Certification Program in the School of Computing and Information. Dr. Trish Crawford, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education in Language, Literacy, and Culture in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading. And finally, Dr. Katrina Bartow Jacobs, Associate Professor of Practice in the Dept of Teaching, Learning, and Leading, and Research Coordinator, Falk Laboratory School. Dr. Bartow Jacobs served as the dissertation committee chair and my PhD advisor, and to whom I am grateful for her guidance and partnership throughout my time at the University of Pittsburgh.

None of this would have been possible without the constant support of my wife Becca and her caring and empathetic patience as the semesters turned into years. Thank you for always being there with Pepper and never letting me give up.

This dissertation is dedicated to all of ‘Mr. Hill’s Heroes’. Tonight, make good choices. Be good to one another. Don’t change. I love you just the way you are.

## 1.0 Introduction

Since the earliest days of United States colonial governance, research and discourse around Native American education, and the education of Native American, Indigenous, First Nations (NAI/FN) peoples has centered on deficit perspectives. Education has been a tool of assimilation by dominant forces intended to, “kill the Indian and save the man” (Reese, 2019). In recent decades, that deficit perspective has come to mean holding Indigenous populations to educational standards not created in relation to or with respect for their perspectives and contexts. Federal policies in the United States and Canada attempted to eliminate Native cultures (Tiller, 2001), but were then replaced with measures of assessment and expectations with no consideration to cultural background or any substance beyond mainstream understandings of educational success (McCarty, 2009). Federal governments of both the United States and Canada took away a language, and without support, expected those individuals to speak with the tongue of the oppressor. As this was happening, schools would attempt to educate communities and report that the children couldn’t learn, yet provided nothing in the way of support (Chan et al., 2019).

In the last 30+ years, Indigenous communities have spoken out and have taken ownership of the education of their children. They have advocated for and implemented local knowledges and methodologies to make the instruction and pedagogies in their community more culturally relevant and appropriate (Lee & McCarty, 2017). There are only a handful of communities in which this is currently happening successfully, but the results have shown that when students can recognize their lived experiences in curricular materials, they are in a better position to succeed by school based measures such as standardized assessments (Hill, 2016). One of the most effective

tools for these positive changes to occur is through the use of children's literature that centers in Indigenous perspectives (Reese, 2015, 2019).

This dissertation is a case study of North Mesa Elementary<sup>1</sup>, a public school on constitutionally sovereign tribal lands in northern New Mexico. This study answers questions attempting to understand how a school serving a Native American population negotiates and enacts an English Language Arts curriculum using a culturally relevant pedagogy paradigm. The work that is shared by the educators looks to include culture into western education rather than insert western education into the culture (Pewewardy, 1994). The stories of the students and the community are turned into educational practice. Through interviews with teachers and administrators, this study seeks to understand how North Mesa makes sense of curriculum and expectations that do not always reflect local perspectives and values, and how the staff and teachers work with and against this curriculum to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to succeed. This study was centered on the following questions:

- How does an NA/I/FN-serving public-school design and negotiate a culturally responsive ELA curriculum?
  - How is this measured?
  - How is this achieved through collaboration with entities both within and outside the walls of the school?
- What specific steps are taken by school members (i.e., administration, teachers, and staff) to enact and reinforce these curricular approaches within the school setting
  - What policies are put in place by administration? What negotiations occur?
  - How do teachers enact and create pedagogy/curriculum that addresses these goals?
- What are current trends within commercially available children's books (ages 3-8) created by and for Indigenous populations?
  - How can teachers use these representations in classrooms?

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the school, community, and participants are pseudonyms.

- How might these texts be used for a wider audience outside of these communities, in order to support knowledge for Indigenous populations?

In the pages that follow, I will explain the background research that preceded this study, methodologies used for data collection and analysis, the findings, examples and uses of children's literature, and implications for further research. Before proceeding with the study, itself, it is important to ground my work within the theoretical frameworks that guide my thinking. I will first explore how I am framing culturally relevant pedagogy and how it is defined in the context in the study; I will also go over the fundamental tenets of TribalCrit and, explain how it connects to this line of inquiry.

### **1.1 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Despite improvements in how Indigenous children are educated in the United States when compared to policies of elimination and assimilation, there are still major obstacles in providing appropriate instruction and materials for these communities. They can be understood as deficiencies in teacher training programs, continued racist portrayals in the larger society, and difficulties in securing trustworthy materials (Almeida, 1996). Guy Jones and Sally Moomaw (2002) have done considerable research on how these issues manifest in early childhood education and have come to similar conclusions focusing specifically on curricular materials. However, they state that instructional materials are not the only issue and draw attention to how Native and Indigenous students are taught. Almeida as well as Jones and Moomaw all discuss how instruction for these students is rarely centered in their contexts and understandings, and therefore fall short in very important ways. To better understand how educators and schools can provide the most relevant and appropriate instruction possible, I looked to Gloria Ladson-Billing's (1995) historical



work on culturally relevant pedagogy, and how it can be understood and applied in an Indigenous-serving school<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout her career, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2022) worked towards an understanding and practice of pedagogy that, “grounded action in cultural understandings, experiences, and ways of knowing the world” (p. 65). Centering this knowledge in the lives of the student, she developed and spent years refining a pedagogical practice, “that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions perpetuate” (1995, p. 469). While centered in African American communities, this same theoretical model can be applied to the teaching of Indigenous cultures, and the representations of communities in instructional settings and materials.

Culturally relevant pedagogy foregrounds the achievement and the learning of the student, but a large component lies in the work of the educator to bring about these changes and instructional moves. In a collection of writings centered on this topic, Ladson-Billings (2022) stresses that what has occurred in the classrooms where culturally relevant pedagogy occurs is not miraculous, but a well-honed craft and deliberate practice. A key piece of this research centered on how well teachers talk about and reflect on their work. In this study, I spoke to educators attempting to make instruction culturally relevant and asked them to reflect not only what they do

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study I use the terms Native American and Indigenous interchangeably when discussing broad concepts of identity. Specific tribal groups are named where appropriate. The act of naming was always the first attempt at identifying.

in the day to day, but how they came to understand a type of instruction that centers student achievement and knowledge.

The teachers and administrator that were interviewed for this study, who will be introduced in a later chapter, all came from different backgrounds and experiences with pedagogy and instruction but held similar understandings of what culturally relevant could mean. Despite having different trainings, academic backgrounds, and their own lived experiences, all of the participants came to understand that the student and their culture should be foregrounded in instruction so that the students could not only see themselves in the instructional spaces, but also make sense of what was being asked of them. The activities and lessons that the educators engaged in could be seen as acts of culturally relevant pedagogies, however the educators themselves may not have identified them as such. The role that their teacher training programs played into this level of understanding is elaborated upon later in the study.

At North Mesa elementary, there are professional development and training opportunities for the teachers to meet with tribal elders and community stakeholders to better understand not only where the students are coming from culturally and linguistically, but to establish an expectation of how students will be taught, and what that content may be in relation to expectations of the state and other government entities. As the school is publicly funded, there are constant negotiations occurring. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2022) reminds us that, “there is no script, no checklist, no set of techniques. Culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach to teaching that relies on teachers as decision makers and intellectuals who are able to translate and implement research and policy” (p. 4). The teachers in the study can be viewed as trusted decisionmakers, who rely on local experts to take the stories of the community and apply them to academic measures.

Again, returning to the original location of culturally relevant pedagogy, the theory was developed in classrooms of African American teachers and students. Though members of similar communities, there were enough differences between educator and student that the teachers needed to find ways to make their instruction relevant to their students by understanding their needs and holding high expectations for achievement. The teachers in this study engage in similar acts of understanding, and through carefully thought out and supported instructional activities enact culturally responsive pedagogies. While founded in a different context, the theory can be applied in the North Mesa community because as Dr. Ladson-Billings explains that communities that have suffered under oppression, can find commonalities therein while acknowledging the specifics of their experiences. It is for this reason that culturally relevant pedagogy was applied as a framing device to understand the instructional choices made in this school.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

The work of Brian Jones McKinley Brayboy has been centered as a framing device throughout the Milestone and dissertation process. Specifically, Brayboy's (2005) work on finding an understanding for tribal critical race theory, or TribalCrit<sup>3</sup>, is a starting point for this research. Due to its importance in the field of Native American and Indigenous theory, as well as the building blocks of analysis for the studies that motivated this dissertation, it is important to understand both how Brayboy was informed by previous work on Critical Race and Legal studies, as well as

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<sup>3</sup> The spelling of TribalCrit is used by Brayboy throughout his work and therefore is maintained here.

moving forward from his writing, how TribalCrit informed further work in the field and how it applies to analysis here.

As a former middle school teacher, Brian Jones McKinley Brayboy, a self-reporting Lumbee tribal member, found that there was cu. Brayboy posits that the current systems are established in direct conflict to the community ways of learning. He explains that TribalCrit was established to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government and attempts to make sense of these populations as both racial and legal/political groups and individuals. The author's theory is rooted in Critical Legal Studies and Critical Race Theory citing numerous texts as influencing the theory of TribalCrit.

Before explaining how education plays a role in his theory, the author first traces the origins of ancestral studies to Critical Legal Studies (CLS). By citing Robert W. Gordon (1990), Brayboy establishes the base for TribalCrit by showing there was criticism within legal studies that rule and law benefited the wealthy and powerful, rather than being the neutral system it had claimed to be for many years. Gordon's basis for this argument is rooted in the fact that all law is some form of social policy, which ideally would address the needs of the peoples it was written for, though that has not always been the case. The author points out that even for liberal lawyers, if the social aspects of the law were present, such as who was affected by the law and how it impacted them directly, it was only mentioned casually and in passing, if at all.

Gordon's work directly calls upon the role hegemony played in these structures as for years those in dominant power, in addition to those being dominated, all believed the structures of power to be sufficient. This was maintained through a system where those subjugated under the law, "reproduced the world they know because they (falsely) believe they have no choice" (p. 421). Robert Gordon points out that they never knew they could change until they tried; however, many

were not able to try and change these experiences due to the structures that were in place that maintained these power structures.

Gordon believed that more needed to be done than just thinking about the change that needed to occur, and that action must take place at every level of the system. This call provides grounding for Brayboy's theory by showing that systems of power have been created and maintained by and for those who are able to control them; but not for the most vulnerable for whom they should provide protection. Those at the top in power will not change and provide for the needs of those under the rule of the law and what they need. The changes must occur at the community level within schools by placing the power into the hands of the tribal entities to educate towards a more appropriate understanding of education and progress.

Moving away from legal studies into direct studies of race and racial issues and the power that is wielded to either lift up or once again subjugate, Brayboy cites John Calmore to elaborate on the point of Critical Race Studies (CRS) as "opposition scholarship". Calmore (1992), in relating this theory to jazz music, states that CRS should be grounded in a sense of reality that reflects the experiences of people of color. "Race-conscious experience is a springboard from which we engage in fundamental criticism" (p. 2137). These unique and distinct experiences are used as a frame of reference as can be shown in many of Brayboy's (2005) tenets which take the power that exists in educational settings, many times through colonial perspectives and value systems, and once again placing it in the hands of the people who will have direct interaction with the schooling and learning. Neither Gordon (1990) nor Calmore (1992) speak directly to education as an area in which power has been created and manipulated, but Brayboy cites them as ancestral and historical sources from which to build a critical theory of education that is unique and distinct to the needs of Native American and Indigenous peoples.

To begin the transition into critical studies in relation to education, Brayboy cites the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate as the foremost piece of theory on which to build Tribal Crit. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) provide one of the earliest instances of Critical Race Theory (CRT) entering into education and doing so by showing that the inequalities of society as a whole are replicated in educational institutions and classroom settings. They frame CRT as part of education inequalities by providing the following three points:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. US society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity.

As an educator, Brayboy cites this text as necessary to understanding the gap between community understandings of learning through storytelling and that of American educational systems. Aside from the similarities in the name, Brayboy draws heavily upon this theory in crafting an understanding of CRT for American Indians.

Brayboy's work is often considered a subgenre of CRT, positioned alongside Latinx Critical Race Theory as one that was created using the foundations of CRT but unique in and of itself for the specific group that it is written. Researchers have taken TribalCrit and applied it to other studies and contexts due to its ability to travel. While each tribal group has its own unique stories and perspectives that are vital to a complete understanding of the groups' positioning, TribalCrit takes a foundational approach and relies on similarities between groups that can be applied for multiple groups. Tara Yosso took the ideas of TribalCrit and spoke to them in her work on cultural capital.

Yosso (2005) addresses the concerns of capital, specifically community cultural capital, and how it is wielded, acknowledged, ignored, or denied in society and education. She cites an earlier version of Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit theory, a talk given at a conference, when describing the various forms of Critical Theory that have emerged from CRT. Yosso's main point is that lived experiences create cultural capital and can be used to expose racism within education, and when this capital is acknowledged, then it can be used to restructure US institutions, specifically around those, "knowledges, skills, abilities and networks – the community cultural wealth – possessed and utilized by People of Color" (p. 82).

These points are similar to Brayboy's (2005) in that the idea of utilizing, recognizing, and empowering local contexts for the good of the community is the overarching goal. While Yosso (2005) speaks more broadly about cultural capital, it is similar in part to Brayboy (2005), in so much that it draws upon recognizing local contexts from which to build larger theory. However, the issue of who can build from that place of knowing within a community becomes an issue of power in communities that have been previously marginalized by institutions and people in power. This also manifests in the role that identity plays in educational spaces. While searching for works like Brayboy's that call upon aspects of power of place, the text *Red Pedagogy* by Sandy Grande (2004) came to my attention as a piece to further investigate as one to form larger analysis of representations in curricula.

Grande begins her book by summarizing for the reader the colonial and Eurocentric influences that have shaped theory in and around Native and Indigenous spaces. She points out that only until recent decades have Native and Indigenous researchers begun to move away from older ways of conducting research and have begun to advocate for local contexts that reflect not only the researcher but also the communities with which the research is intended to represent.

Parallels can be drawn between this new way of conducting research and the increase in culture and language programs held in communities which have attempted to, not just reinstate traditional ways of culture and language, but attempted to dismantle colonial ways of knowing (Arviso et al., 2012). Within the introduction, Grande (2004) points out that, “language and the ability to name one’s experiences are precursors to emancipation” (p. 5). When discussing identity of Native and Indigenous peoples, who can name the individual is a highly controversial and colonial practice that is only deconstructed when the individual regains their language and their own story.

The broader idea of identity is one that is considered to be a hegemonic and colonial way of pointing out the ‘other’ which in turn retains structures of power that limit the ability for many communities to speak to and advocate for their best interests. Grande points out that many Native communities are required to show that they are maintaining the old traditional ways to be considered Native or Indigenous, but those ‘old ways’ are not recognized by mainstream institutions of power, such as schools. Consequently, if a group is considered too contemporary, they are prevented from obtaining their identity through governing bodies. Speaking specifically to United States contexts, it is only the federal government that can confer “recognition” (p. 99) rather than the tribal groups themselves.

It should be noted that this does not prevent groups from self-identifying and naming their place and their stories. However, it does prevent these individuals from receiving support from the governing entities that wield power over communities, that have been decimated by those same institutions for generations. It is more than just recognition that is desired, but the ability to advocate for and sustain healthy communities built in localized and culturally significant ways. Identity is a highly relative construct according to Grande, and it has taken on new meanings with



the ever-growing global marketplace and the appropriation and voyeuristic tendencies of outside communities, most often from the cultural mainstream.

She points out the idea of being Native or Indigenous is appealing to cultural mainstream individuals, who ignore the struggles and conflict that occur in those communities. While many individuals claim to have Native American or Indigenous ancestry within their genetics, Grande points out that this is another form of appropriation by claiming an identity without understanding the persecution or cultural hardships of those who have attempted to name themselves in such a way. Members of culturally powerful groups can claim these identities while maneuvering in and out of privilege without real consequence of how they name themselves.

These ideas of power of identity move to inform this research by centering individuals in texts as being either part of a larger community living in the spaces and contexts that have defined those peoples; or does the representation provide something to gaze upon from the outside without a deeper understanding of the individual? Brayboy's (2005) centering of education in local contexts, and Grande's (2004) ideas of identity as power that can lift up or become preyed upon, inform this work in looking at representations in texts by requiring further examination than just a passing glance. Are the representations in curricular materials provided to give power to the individuals portrayed by telling their story in their contexts, or is it something that is to be consumed for the enjoyment of the reader? Additionally, the question of how teachers present and talk about these representations is the guiding inquiry for the dissertation study. Therefore, the issues of race and representation explained in this section are a necessary framing device that have influenced the second round of coding concerning culture, language, and power.

### 1.3 Positionality

It is important to make known and explicit my position as the creator and researcher for this study, as I identify as a white male of European descent. For many members of Native and Indigenous communities I am a representation of the colonizing forces. Throughout the various stages of the dissertation study, I continued to reevaluate and made explicit my intentions for the methods, outcomes, and dissemination of information (Smith, 2012; Semali & Kincheloe, 2011). By doing so, I attempted to maintain a form of consciousness necessary to make known the perceptions of my own cultural heritage, as well as preparing for issues that this position may bring about through the course of the study (Milner, 2007); performing work in a marginalized community, as someone who has benefit from the power structures I question and problematize.

My desire to follow this research is based in my time as an elementary school teacher in North Mesa. During my time as an educator there, I worked closely with tribal entities such as the town's Cultural Center, the tribe's Department of Education, and family and community members to develop a culturally responsive school environment (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). This process included a reworking of English language arts classes, specifically vocabulary instruction to include play-based learning and culturally relevant materials. The use of such techniques in my practice led to increases in student performance on standardized assessments, confidence in academic tasks, and abilities to self-monitor on school-based tasks (Hill, 2016). These steps I took as a practitioner researcher have guided my research interests towards what was enacted here.

In no way can I speak for the tribal nation or its members, nor is that the intended outcome of this or any study I have conducted. Rather, through an awareness of a distinct knowledge and understanding of how my world interacts with theirs, it was a goal of this study to

create a space in which these contexts were shown respect and value in an academic setting, which has historically undervalued, or even ignored (Battiste, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Toward that end, it was vital to maintain a Critical Indigenous (CI) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) lens throughout this study, in that for whom the research will benefit must always be a question that one must ask. As CI is linked to a past, present and future, it must be made clear by that this study is given meaning to people, and not conducted in isolation, without purpose.

The knowledge I gained through the course of this study is not my own, nor do I claim any ownership of it. Instead, I work towards a shared understanding of respect wherein I use my position as a researcher to contextualize and bring power to the culture, knowledge, and power of the community of North Mesa.

#### **1.4 Motivation**

The work that was the foundation for this study can be traced back to my time as an early childhood classroom educator at North Mesa elementary. I entered my first full time classroom unprepared, and unaware of the needs of teaching in an Indigenous community. I sought assistance through the tribe's cultural center and elders who would share with me ways to make my instruction more appropriate for the children in my first-grade classroom. This eventually led to my enrollment at the University of New Mexico where I conducted a study on play-based learning and how it benefited my students. This resulted in a Master of Arts degree in Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies. While I could see very real effects in student performance on classwork, assessments and more importantly, in their day-to-day interactions with learning and instruction,

they were continually considered failing by standardized assessments required by the state of New Mexico.

In time I left the community and began teaching in an urban school outside of Pittsburgh, PA. My connections with the community remained strong and I became aware of changes at the state level in New Mexico that would influence how instruction was delivered in North Mesa. In 2019, after many years of court battles, a judge finally ruled in the Martinez and Yazzie consolidated case against the state. This ruling established that New Mexico had not done enough for Native American and Hispanic students, requiring the Public Education Department to dedicate more resources and funding to these communities. The goal was to increase achievement and results on standardized measures. North Mesa would directly benefit from this ruling.

In 2020, before the COVID 19 outbreak shuttered schools and changed how instruction was delivered across the world an article was published in the newspaper the Rio Grande Sun sensationalizing the test results of the North Mesa district and drawing attention to the number of students who were leaving the community and enrolled in neighboring districts, the closest being 27 miles to the east. In both the court case and the article, negative attention was drawn to North Mesa and framing what was being said as lack of high-quality instruction. As a former educator, I knew this to be a false statement, and one that did not focus on the root of the problem, inaccurate and inappropriate representations and assessments measure that put the students of North Mesa at a disadvantage when compared to other public schools in the state.

At this time, I was already enrolled in the PhD program at the University of Pittsburgh working towards a degree in Language, Literacy, and Culture, and studying the types of curricula and literature the teachers at North Mesa were using and how did it meet the needs of representation. These developments, Martinez v. Yazzie and the newspaper article, shifted the

research focus to an understanding of what the teachers and administrators are doing in the school that is not seen, nor reported on when conversations about student performance are occurring. Rather than content analysis, I would now look at a more holistic educational approach.

I chose to remain with an early plan for this study by focusing on English Language Arts curriculum and instruction for a few reasons, but the greatest of these was because of the alignment of ELA goals and skills to the oral traditions of the community where North Mesa is located. Elaborated upon later, the tribal nation that surrounds the school shared of their knowledge, information, and perspectives through the act and art of storytelling. Many of the nation's histories were maintained through oral language through generations. Only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was a syllabary developed and some of these traditions were then written down. ELA instruction enacts components of oral language traditions, and therefore would be the most beneficial content area from which to discuss how this school has turned stories into practice. The following section provides background information on the school itself.

### **1.5 North Mesa Elementary**

The school site in this study is an elementary school on tribal lands in Northern New Mexico. To protect the privacy of the community and respect their wishes of anonymity, the pseudonym of North Mesa will be used throughout to name the school, district, and community. Despite its location within reservation boundaries, the school is a public school, which receives its funding primarily from the State of New Mexico's Public Education Department (PED). Therefore, it is required to follow the guidelines and measures of achievement set forth by the state, examples of which are shown below. Unlike Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, which receive

their funding from federal entities and therefore must adhere to different reporting methods, North Mesa follows the Common Core State Standards used by the state’s PED, as well as receiving funding from the state. Recently, the school was ensured adequate funding through the decision of *Martinez/Yazzie v. New Mexico* (Rodríguez, 2019). This court case determined that the state of New Mexico was not providing adequate funding for schools of high Hispanic and Native American populations. One of the byproducts of this decision is that districts which have schools serving these populations are required to provide additional accountability and reporting.

As can be seen in the table below, North Mesa’s student population identifies primarily as Native American ( or American Indian, the identifier used by the PED). The data contained in this table is from the 2017-2018 school year, the most recent available district report card, and shows information for the student population across the district. It should be noted that on the report card, population data is presented across the district and not broken down by individual school. Also worth noting concerning the school is that 100% of the population is considered Economically Disadvantaged, and therefore every child enrolled in the district qualifies for free-or-reduced lunch programs. Additionally, 20% of the district population is identified as English Language Learners; however, English is the primary language of the community. There are recent attempts at revitalizing the tribal language, but the percentage of fluent speakers is not reported in this data, nor was it able to be determined with conversations with local community members.

**Table 1 North Mesa School District Demographics**

District	Number of Students	Percentage
Total Students	674	100
American Indian	639	94.8

Caucasian	5	0.7
African American	1	0.1
Hispanic	25	3.7
Asian	4	0.6
Economically Disadvantaged	674	100
ELL	129	19.1

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North Mesa Elementary is a PreK-5 school building that is staffed by classroom teachers, educational assistants, paraprofessionals, and culture and language teachers that come from the community and from beyond the region. The table below shows the current distribution of number of classrooms per grade level<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 2 North Mesa Elementary School Grade Level Classrooms**

Grade Level	Number of Classrooms
PreK	1
K	3
1 <sup>st</sup>	2
2 <sup>nd</sup>	3
3 <sup>rd</sup>	3
4 <sup>th</sup>	3

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<sup>4</sup> North Mesa only added the PreK class in 2019 after the data in this section was published.

### 1.5.1 North Mesa's Teachers

In the younger grades, PreK-2, each classroom is staffed with a licensed teacher and educational assistant. In 3-5, the licensed teacher works alone as the classroom educator. Various specials are taught throughout the school including PE, Music, and Culture and Language. All students take these courses. The school has a well-stocked library, but not a full-time librarian to provide services. An interesting fact that can be gleaned from the state data is that the licensed teachers at North Mesa all hold certifications from accredited institute, and less than one percent of teachers across the district hold alternative licensure. The table below shows that the teachers at North Mesa hold degrees of Bachelor's or higher in substantial numbers.

Total Teachers	Bachelor's	Advanced
20	35%	65%

Despite the number of teachers and staff employed at the school, only four classroom teachers volunteered to be part of this study. The reasons behind this number are described in a later chapter, however the those that did fill out the survey and take part in the interviews were highly motivated and were eager to share their stories. Before proceeding, I will introduce them to provide insight into the understandings of the staff at North Mesa.



### **1.5.1.1 Roberta**

Roberta, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, is fairly new to the district but found that she was able to fit in with the school community as many of the goals concerning culturally relevant instruction aligned with her training in her licensing program in the Philippines. Prior coming to North Mesa two years ago, she spent 11 years teaching all subjects at schools in her home country. She spoke about the profession of being a teacher is highly respected, so growing up she always knew this is what she wanted to do. Despite her desire to provide the best type of instruction possible, she found that the language and cultural barriers she was experience often made them difficult tasks. She volunteered for this study to better understand how her instruction and the local culture could fit together.

### **1.5.1.2 Stella**

Understanding that she had always been a teacher, even as a young child growing up in Michigan, Stella also knew that becoming an educator was the only choice for her. She is the most experienced educator in this study having spent all 40 years of her career in North Mesa. She taught in many different classes and contents, but has spent the most time in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, where she currently is one of two teachers at that grade level. Because of her extensive experience and deep rooted connections with the community, Stella was able to discuss with ease and certainty how her instruction was based in the community and was tailored to the success of the students.

### **1.5.1.3 Cathy**

On the other end of the community experience, Cathy is one of two members of this study who are in their first year. Like Roberta, Cathy grew up and was trained in the Philippines and has found the implementation of culturally relevant materials and pedagogies to be meaningful, but a difficult task as a newcomer. As a reading intervention teacher, she has flexibility with the

materials she implements in instruction, therefore has been able to implement a more robust set of resources than her grade level counterparts.

#### **1.5.1.4 Melissa**

Melissa is also in her first year at North Mesa but spent the past 26 years teaching in a community 30 miles to the east. She came to her first-grade classroom with information about the community and the people of the surrounding area but didn't quite understand how to bring their stories and contexts into instruction. She, like Roberta, made frequent mention of the culture and language teachers helping with resources and examples and would often rely on the parents of her students to answer questions and provide insight into what should and could be doing. She also made frequent mention that she didn't always feel welcome when trying to make connections but continued to do so as it was a requirement of administration, at least from her perspective.

#### **1.5.1.5 Ms. Irene**

Finally, the principal of the school, Ms. Irene, participated in the study to provide her insight as an administrator and tribal member. Having grown up in the community and 3 of her 4 children attending the North Mesa schools, Irene was in the best position to provide comparative data for how instruction used to occur and what this currently looks like in the elementary school. She was a culture and language teacher for six years before obtaining her administrators license at the University of New Mexico where, according to her, they barely touched on culturally relevant understandings. She pointed out that everything she knew was from her and family's experiences.

The five individuals interviewed in this study all came to North Mesa with different experiences and backgrounds in instruction and pedagogy. However, they all worked towards

building materials and practices that were not only relevant to the students, but to the community as a whole. More of their study is told throughout the findings in later chapters.

### 1.5.2 School-Wide Performance

The impetus for this study was student performance on state assessments as being the main indicator of success, as measured by the PED. These assessments include the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment and the New Mexico Alternate Performance Assessment (NMAPA). The table below again is drawn from 2017-2018 data and is the main resource used by the PED for assigning a grade on the district report card. In addition to providing the data for the school in this study, I also included state level data as a comparative point for why the school is considered ‘failing’.

**Table 3 Standards Based Assessment Performance - Reading Proficiency**

Grade	North Mesa Elementary		State	
	Proficient	Not Proficient	Proficient	Not Proficient
Kindergarten	53%	47%	62%	38%
1 <sup>st</sup>	27%	73%	60%	40%
2 <sup>nd</sup>	39%	61%	68%	32%
3 <sup>rd</sup>	5%	95%	30%	70%
4 <sup>th</sup>	10%	90%	30%	70%
5 <sup>th</sup>	6%	94%	31%	69%

There is general consensus among the teachers in North Mesa as well as in published literature concerning standardized assessments, that these measures of culturally and linguistically

biased. They are given space in this study as they are so highly valued at the PED, however, throughout the course of this study, I will explain why other measures are more appropriate for this and other communities similarly serving children outside of what is typically considered “the mainstream”.

In the following chapters I will establish background and the need for this study to position this work in research that has already occurred, but more appropriately, the work that has yet to be done. I will establish my methodologies and introduce the participants, explaining how they utilize local knowledges to meet the needs of their students focusing on the role children’s literature has to play in these decisions. Finally, I address implications for further research and teacher education to show that what is happening in a small school in northern New Mexico can be applied to any classroom that seeks to better understand how the lives of the students and their experiences are a place from which to build culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

“It may be that we are all born with a sense of story. A basic wisdom of educating is to provide a context in which this natural human sense may be nourished” (Cajete, 1994, p. 137)

For many Native American, Indigenous, and First Nations (NA/I/FN) communities, education begins with the story. It is the first exposure many communities engage with in regard to communication and transmissions of culture. A young child is introduced to the world, their family, and life through the stories that are told. Stories are the means through which knowledge, spirituality, and history are transmitted from one generation to another. The knowledge of the elders is communicated with youth in almost all communities, furthering the ideals and values that are intended to be continued from generation to generation. For many children in NA/I/FN communities, they enter school spaces strong in oral traditions and knowledge of previous experiences communicated to them through storytelling.

However, there is a disconnect between these previously held ways of knowing and current educational settings found in North American schools, particularly in the United States (Reyhner & Eder, 2004; Tiller, 2001). In many classrooms across the continent, instruction has been reduced to a skill and drill style that requires teachers to touch on a subject, or concept, and move on quickly to ensure the passing of high stakes testing, often times tied into state and federal funding for schools (McCarthy, 2009). Frequently, these tests and expectations are centered on linguistic and literacy learning norms within the mainstream, predominantly white middle-class culture of the

United States and Canada. By hyper focusing on these skills, facts, and figures, there are many contexts which are being removed or outright ignored for those students outside of the white, middle-class cultural majority (McCarty, 2009; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The removal of these opportunities eliminates previously held understandings of learning and knowing for these students from oral language backgrounds. Gregory Cajete (1994) describes this presenting of knowledge in isolated ways as an illusion of Western thinking. Removing myth and poetry from instructional spaces and isolating them in one specific content area, while also separating the arts, environmental concepts, history, and politics, makes it difficult for knowledge and learning to be truly expressed in its fullest terms. This can be viewed as an incomplete education, thus further burdening students from these learning environments by providing instruction that is inaccurate, invalid, and overall lacking in known and comfortable community learning styles. Familiar ways of coming to and processing knowledge.

Not only are these oral language histories being silenced in instructional spaces, but representations within are also missing or inappropriate (Hill, 2016). In a earlier study I conducted on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade commercially available English Language Arts curriculum, discussed in a later chapter, representations of NA/I/FN individuals were few and far between in English/Language Arts instruction. Those that were present, were shown in stereotypical and essentialized ways. Individuals were presented as wearing buckskin with their hair in braids traveling on horseback across the plains of the Midwest region of the United States. Male gendered individuals were shown to be brave warriors hunting for the community, while female gendered individuals were shown as providing childcare and tasks which can be understood as ‘homemaking’ in traditional Western understandings. This lack of context and understanding not only harms the education of NA/I/FN students, but also prevents students outside of these communities, both the cultural

mainstream and other outside groups, from understanding and viewing these communities in a fair, equal, and contemporary way.

Due to the importance of representation and the need to understand how issues of identity have already been studied, this review of current literature was informed by the following research question:

- How do teachers' identities, understandings of students' identity and understanding of how particular characters are represented in instructional materials inform their instruction around representations of Native American, Indigenous, and First Nations peoples?

Throughout this chapter and the larger dissertation study, the words used to identify cultural groups shifts depending on contexts. In an effort to respect those groups who were specifically named in studies, their tribal and historical names are used. For generalization purposes, NA/I/FN is used when a specific group is not named. This is done so in honor of those communities whose identities have been stripped through centuries of forced assimilation, genocide, and broken treaties.

## **2.2 Methods**

To better understand how representations of Native American, Indigenous, and First Nations were studied in elementary English/Language Arts curricula, it was necessary to conduct a search for relevant literature and studies in the field. Utilizing the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, a search was conducted using the keywords, 'identity' and 'native American or American Indian or Indigenous or Native Tribes or Native people' and

‘English Language Arts Curriculum’. This returned one result. Therefore, the search was rerun with ‘Curriculum’ replacing the longer search term, which in turn yielded 96 results.

The publication years were then changed to 2009-2019 which reduced the number to 28. This range of years was decided upon as the work returned in the United States contexts would occur after Race to the Top (RTTP), a renewed version of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and therefore, the data would be the most relevant to teachers currently in the field. Specifically speaking to NA/I/FN communities, RTTP proved to be another legislation that failed to provide for these communities due to high expectations despite having exacerbated hardships not experienced by many public schools (*National Indian Education Association, 2011*). This context is important for consideration as the only recent major piece of educational legislation that has had an impact on instruction and curricular choices by schools and educators.

In addition, it was during this range of years, that Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation commission on Indian Residential Schools was published, thus impacting literature moving forward in that geopolitical area. The commission was tasked with uncovering how Canada’s residential school system, similar to the United States’ boarding schools, detrimentally affected the lives and education of countless Indigenous, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit individuals (Niezen, 2017). Those papers that were written following the Commission’s 2016 report, directly reflect the findings and report’s immediate and anticipated impact on students of NA/I/FN ancestry. A further reduction was made by looking specifically at pieces published in Academic Journals, bringing the number to 19.

As mentioned previously, a brief literature review that occurred for the motivational study that this review is based upon uncovered that most of the literature produced was only available in middle and secondary contexts. Therefore, another inquiry was run removing the search term



‘elementary’ to uncover more resources that explain where the field of identity in curricula may currently exist. Using the same temporal requirements of 2009-2019 as well as limiting the publications to academic journals, this search resulted in 80 relevant returns, as determined by the search terms as they related to this review’s research question, 99 total between the two searches. It should be noted that there was overlap between the two ERIC searches, 15, therefore the total number of resources that emerged that would be considered was brought down to 84.

Due to the very specific nature of contexts of Native, Indigenous, and First Nations peoples on the North American continent, those studies that occurred outside of the current geopolitical constructions of Canada, The United States, and Mexico, were eliminated. While Indigeneity studies have revealed similarities around the world and hold value within the larger scope of mutual understanding across lived experiences, this review only focused on those in a local context. This parameter of place eliminated 52 studies by their location alone. Using titles and keywords listed in the database result list, others were rejected as they did not fit the scope of this review (e.g., a literature review, no mention of Native American, Indigenous, or First Nations peoples, and out of classroom learning). This allowed for a closer read of 27 abstracts that remained after the eliminations described above.

After a thorough read of the abstracts, an additional four studies were removed due to, once again, their content area occurring outside of the scope of identity of Native American, Indigenous, and First Nations peoples in curriculum. These studies included the topics of administration studies, teacher education and teacher identity (professional and not specifically cultural or personal) as well as social action outside of classroom learning. This left me with 23 pieces to review that fit into the aforementioned search criteria.

Once these articles were obtained, an in-depth assessment of the texts began to find themes of identity in curriculum, instruction, and choices made by educators. During this process, four more were removed from the set of articles for various reasons that included: a study not relating specifically to NA/I/FN peoples but tangentially mentioning that the study occurred in a Canadian province where there was a high population of individuals who identified in these ways, a description of a charter school that was designed for Native American students in New Mexico, a personal account of navigating educational spaces as a self-identifying Native individual, and an article written for a journal that could not be verified as being rigorous in selection of content.

Of the remaining articles, a position paper on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) report was set aside to be included in a description of TRC in another section, as it did not specifically address curriculum and instructional choices made by teachers. Finally, two articles were determined to be of value for the need of accurate cultural representations in texts, but one occurred outside of school-based settings, hospital and health training, while another was an essay on history curricula in the United States but did not mention specifically perspectives of NA/I/FN peoples or contexts. Once the final articles were accepted to be included in this study, a more thorough reading of each occurred, which led to the following findings.

### **2.3 Findings**

As was anticipated from the outset of the collection of the articles, very few studies occurred within the content areas of English and Language Arts. The majority of the data obtained emerged from Social Studies/History instruction, with a large number also occurring in cultural and language courses that existed in specific community settings. In addition, most of the written

pieces occurred in what is now geopolitically known as Canada, as well as Mexico. Very few studies considered for this review took place in United States contexts. This is not to say that studies are not occurring within these spaces, but they were not discovered through the methodology of this search. Because the goal was to understand how NA/I/FN peoples were portrayed in curricula through the geographic region of North America, this finding was expected. The lack of United States contexts was disheartening, but not surprising.

Two major themes emerged from the reading of these texts: there are two types of representations that occur in the results of these papers, 1) affirmed identities or ignored identities and 2) the unpreparedness of teachers to teach NA/I/FN students and/or contexts. These findings were first sorted between the two types of representation (affirmed or ignored) and synthesized in their respective classifications. These classifications emerged after deep readings of the text occurred, and I began the process of sorting by similarities. While each study centered and spoke to theories of identity differently, these labels were attributed to the studies by the author. Within these identity styles, the studies are categorized by content area, to better understand how certain instructional realms address issues of identity differently. The theme of the under-prepared nature of many instructors ran throughout many of the texts and will thus be mentioned following the discussion of identity.

### **2.3.1 Affirmed Identity**

Within the studies considered for this review, NA/I/FN representations were discussed in either one of two ways; a positive affirmation which built on cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) and allowed for success in academic contexts, or ignored identities which foregrounded colonial perspectives and whiteness as the main transmission of information. For affirmed identities,

students were given the opportunity to see themselves in curricular materials that centered local contexts which, in turn, resulted in a foregrounding of lived experiences and familiar knowledge.

### **2.3.1.1 General Education.**

Three of the studies reviewed occurred in general education spaces. Peterson and Horton (2019) incorporated dramatic play into their instruction which was centered around cultural heritage and ways of knowing. Citing multiple sources on the creation of self, the authors understood identity to be established through narrative events that involve multiple modes. Students were able to create agentive identities, by incorporating home languages, perspectives, and dress. The authors noted that teacher reports indicated that the children often used gestures and little or no language when communicating with their peers. As a common feature of communication within the larger community in rural Canada, this can be seen as a success of instruction by blending home and school contexts, which opened up opportunities for deeper learning within other contexts of instruction. Children also reported more positive feelings towards schooling and instruction during these instances of dramatic play.

Play was not the only time where cultural capital and local contexts improved student attitude towards schooling. While interviewing students about what they had learned in a culturally relevant unit of study that took on a Mesocentric, Mesoamerican ancestry, Luna, Evans and Davis (2015) discovered that a more positive learning environment was created when students saw themselves in the instruction. The study occurred in the American Southwest for Latinx identifying students in a public-school setting. Identity was understood through cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) as well as multiple culturally relevant texts that centered on local ways of knowing. The results also revealed that these feelings of value did not only improve academic and school successes, but

also that the aspirations of these students to succeed increased through a program that favored their cultural ways of knowing in traditionally Western settings.

Similarly, López-Gopar (2014) found that when teachers are aware of their students' lived experiences, the quality of instruction and interaction has a direct positive effect on student attitudes and learning. Understanding that identities are a negotiation built in sites of struggle, students and teachers craft and create their own perspectives through narrative identity texts. Placing identity creation in the hands of the students is based in critical pedagogies of social justice by lifting the voice of the oppressed (Freire, 2012). López-Gopar (2014) carried out a program in Oaxaca, Mexico, that allowed pre-service student teachers the opportunity to observe and get to know students before they begin instruction to show the effects of this trust building. The teachers were often times mainstream Mexican teachers who were in classrooms with Indigenous learners, therefore the author stated a specific need for those individuals to critically reflect on the role they have as those bringing English into these communities. It should be noted that the Indigenous students were already speaking their home languages as well as Spanish. Students enrolled in this program would be receiving instruction in English during the duration of this program.

Affirmed student identity was maintained in this instruction through activities that were familiar to students, through multiple languages used during direct instruction, as well as empowering student agency to show not only an appreciation for those ways of knowing, but also their place in mainstream instructional spaces. López-Gopar also provides that teachers who do not speak the languages of Indigenous students can still successfully promote multilingualism and interculturalism by getting to know the students on a personal level and draw those experiences into classroom-based instruction.

### **2.3.1.2 Health and Physical Education.**

The benefits of affirmed identity instruction also appeared in specific content areas such as Health and Physical Education, Mathematics, and Native Studies. Occurring in Canadian provinces, Alexandra Bissell and Lis Korteweg (2016) as well as LeAnne Petherick (2018) speak specifically to the benefits of positive representation in courses designed to improve health and well-being. While not specifically a class labeled 'health', Bissell and Korteweg (2016) studied how the utilization of digital narratives allowed teachers to better understand student identities which allowed for success not only in this specific program on healthy living, but also in larger school and academic goals. The authors did not specifically establish how they would frame identities through theoretical positioning but situated the results in the lived experiences of the participants. By allowing students to self-identify and create their own narrative, the results showed that for Aboriginal students, goals of the curriculum were met in their own unique and distinct ways, allowing students to bring familiar and community knowledge into these spaces.

However, this study adds to a point made above and expanded upon below, that the collaborative effort that occurs between student and teacher shows an unpreparedness for many teachers of NA/IFN students. While the project appears to be putting the work onto the part of the already marginalized students, the youth in the healthy living course and project spoke of empowerment by being able to craft their own narrative and position. Bissell and Korteweg (2016) stress that while there are instances of students' identities being affirmed, there are still multiple instances that show the system and structure of Western schooling still marginalize these students and push them to the outer portions of curricular perspectives.

While not specifically speaking to student perspectives of identity in text, LeAnne Petherick (2018) provides a content analysis of a health and physical education curriculum in

Ontario that speaks to including NA/I/FN perspectives. Petherick did situate identity, however, as being a cultural and racial background that influenced physical activity and understandings of health. The author goes into detail about what the curriculum entails and how First Nations, Metis, and Inuit perspectives are the only non-white examples included in a scripted question and response section of the teacher's guide. Petherick surmises that this is because of the very distinct ways of understanding health, spirituality, and the physical world, but notes that there are multiple views of these topics throughout Canada and that their exclusion further perpetuates this settler view of learning and instruction. It is stressed that in Canada, education is a provincial matter, thus making the curriculum an official government policy that, while affirming and lifting these perspectives, it limits the reach it has for non-white individuals. Even when a curriculum attempts to undo colonial tendencies, the space that whiteness takes up in instruction, still outweighs those benefits.

### **2.3.1.3 Mathematics.**

Moving into what is considered a core content area, Glen Aikenhead (2017) provides a comprehensive review of mathematics curricula and their cultural relevance for Indigenous peoples. This study looks specifically at the overlap, or disconnect, between NA/I/FN understandings of mathematics with those of colonial, Western forms of education. Aikenhead states that this is one of the more difficult content areas in which to include diverse perspectives due to an outcry that, "teaching mathematics culturally would reduce standards" (p. 129). The author goes on to say that this is disproven through multiple studies that show that varying and diverse understandings of mathematics only lead to a strengthening of concepts for all peoples. It is stressed that local and community perspectives should inform curricular decisions, as there is no one particular model that fits all people. Regardless, it is vital for all peoples to see themselves

in contexts that have not always been understood to include multiple ways of knowing, thus allowing for affirmed identity to play a role in the goals, stated or otherwise of a mathematics program. Due to the global nature of the study, Aikenhead refrained from specifically naming constructs of identity. Not specifically stated, it is inferred to the role that identity plays varies across cultural and linguistic contexts in different communities.

#### **2.3.1.4 Culture and Language Courses**

Finally, M. Kristiina Montero, Cassandra Bice-Zaugg, Makwa Oshkwenh-Adam Cyril John and Jim Cummings (2013) provide an example of how visual and literary identity texts, created in a Native Studies program, not only allows for affirmed identity in these spaces, but also promotes success in other content areas as well. The study defined identity broadly as Aboriginal, allowing the voices and perspectives of the participants to create the definition for their own understanding. Once again bringing together teachers and students who have not always shared similar lived experiences, this study took an activist research approach which included involving high school students in the crafting and production of identity texts. Instructors who may not always understand where a student is coming from with their previously lived ways of knowing, are given the opportunity to see their students develop, create, and present pieces of art, music, and literacy which affirm their identities and empower them to take control of their instructional experiences.

This stemmed from the need for teachers who were trained in traditional Western and Colonial pedagogies to understand how they have unconsciously perpetuated these damaging practices and foreground the experiences of their students. The students in the project were able to present their identity texts to multiple audiences. The researchers believed that through positive feedback, the opportunity to answer questions of individuals outside of their cultural group, and



the opportunity to reflect upon the significance of their work, the students were able to solidify their thinking and learning, which was then transferred to different content areas. Students affirmed identity, when created and maintained by the individual, aided in many aspects of schooling and instruction which historically, was a cultural mismatch for those individuals.

This study and those that have come before, show that when identities are affirmed and given a place of power within the instructional setting, the benefits for the students are far reaching beyond the classroom contexts in which they are positioned. However, the process of this review also uncovered that there are instances in which the identities and perspectives of NA/I/FN peoples are ignored or subjugated within curricular materials, resulting in detrimental effects on individuals and communities.

### **2.3.2 Ignored Identity**

As mentioned above, it was expected that a number of studies would be found within the content areas of Social Studies and History. Three such papers were found to have results that spoke to the ignoring of NA/I/FN contexts within these curricula. Along with a study on Religious and Spirituality coursework, these papers work towards uncovering how perspectives marginalized, ignored, or subjugated in an effort to promote Western and colonial ideals. I begin with the study of religion and spirituality as it has the closest ties to Indigenous epistemologies (Cajete, 1994).

#### **2.3.2.1 Religion and Spirituality.**

Once again returning to the TRC report, Chan, Akanmori, and Parker (2019) establish that most Western curricula, religious and secular, are rooted in Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. The

authors point out that this is in direct conflict with many NA/I/FN communities as perspectives of the world are shaped through a restructuring of world views understand various traditions and contexts. The authors use these distinct views to establish their understanding of identity as it pertains to Indigenous peoples affected by the residential school system. The communities in which the individuals lived and how those knowledges are expressed have come to define an identity. These multiple ways of knowing have been systematically silenced and removed from instructional spaces in favor of more narrow ways of viewing learning and knowing. The authors then go on to discuss the importance of religious literacy for all to obtain the content, influence, and role of tradition throughout history, which influences different communities and individuals. While this study is centered in Canadian contexts, the use in United States systems and schools can similarly be installed.

The authors continue by uncovering how current curricular decisions made by schools and educators foster narrow views of the world and limited pedagogies. They conclude by pointing out that perspectives that were created and still maintained by the old systems, silence various ways of knowing, thus limiting the ability of all students to find success within classroom spaces. They call for opportunities of knowledge sharing between communities and schools to ensure that the dialogue about Indigenous religion and spirituality is given an affirmed place and one of power. While the study was conducted in a World Religions public school classroom, the authors believe this shift in perspective can benefit multiple communities and groups of students.

### **2.3.2.2 Social Studies and History.**

While these courses tend to limit varying points of views and identities through teachings of religion and spirituality, social studies and history courses tend to ignore these perspectives through narrow colonial and Western ideals of business, individuality, and self-determination.

Urrita et al., (2019) looked critically at how Latinx history courses further marginalized Indigenous perspectives. They found that the curricula used to teach Latinx perspectives falsely claimed that the current nations of the United States and Mexico had been uninhabited lands that are now occupied by a nation of immigrants, completely erasing the Indigenous populations that were already occupying these lands prior to colonial intrusion. These texts further a Eurocentric view of the continent which favors the settlers while dismissing those who were subjugated and eliminated. These views were established in an understanding of identity rooted in, “multilayered discourses and ideologies of local, national, and transnational social and cultural flows” (p. 147). This was specifically named as Critical Latinx Indigeneities (CLI).

The authors found that many depictions of Latinx individuals are limited to settler or immigrant origins which strongly favor a Spanish heritage, one of conquering that is in turn glorified at the expense of the indigenous peoples. Urrita and colleagues found similarities between curricula used in both California and Texas, both states with high population of Latinx and Hispanic students. However, they point out that while texts in California are subtle in these depictions, Texas blatantly promotes identification similarities with Anglo settlers. Viewing their findings through a CLI frame, the authors point out that the violence targeted at Indigenous peoples should not be shied away from and that curricula should be corrected and rewritten.

Many authors in this review agree that changes must be made to curricula systematically to ensure proper representation and ensure change systemically, but that task is overwhelming and daunting to an individual teacher. Christine Stanton (2019) however points out that, “all teachers have agency – and responsibility” (p. 282), though they did not express how identity was defined for this particular study, but infers knowledge of the reader to define these constructs in familiar and known ways of NA/IFN. Similar to previous studies, Stanton found that the social studies

curriculum utilized by many schools, continues a nation of immigrant myth. This fallacy assumes that the land on the North American continent was devoid of structure and was free for the taking. This of course, “undermines long-standing claims Indigenous peoples have to lands and privileges Eurocentric nationalistic myths” (p. 284). Not acknowledging the individuals who were here before First Contact during instruction perpetuates a myth of emptiness thus justifying the actions of theft and genocide.

The idea that these perspectives are deliberately ignored and hidden is further discussed in the last piece in this section by uncovering deliberate settler grammars in curriculum. Focusing specifically on how texts and curricula speak about settler and colonial knowledge and perspectives are foregrounded and given a place of superiority according to Dolores Calderon (2014). This is shown in discussion not only centered around said superiority, but also by establishing power of territory and space. These themes occurred through multiple social studies curricula as settlers claimed Roman ideologies of *res nullius* (empty thing, belonging to no one) (p. 328) thereby purposefully negating any and all perspectives that did not match this narrative.

Calderon does not solely lay blame for the maintenance of such perspectives on that of the text but maintains that culturally mainstream teachers, “remain ignorant of the realities of Indigenous communities...which is an inevitable outcome of settler ideologies that work to erase and reconstruct Indianness to maintain settler futurity” (p. 332). Calderon establishes Native identities as those ways of knowing and being that are subjugated in the dominant settler understandings of their own identity. As mentioned previously, while looking for issues of identity in curricular representations, the theme of the unpreparedness of teachers and educators began to emerge through many of the studies reviewed. The following section looks at how researchers have come to identify this lack of preparation and how by better enabling teachers, NAI/FN

perspectives can be utilized to undo some, but not all, of the damages caused by misinformation and deliberate ignorance in curricular materials.

### **2.3.3 Teacher Preparedness**

During the readings and analysis of identity representations in curricula, a theme emerged involving teachers and teacher educators. The literature cited that often times those instructing NA/IFN students are from outside communities that they do not identify in the same ways and that they are typically of European and Anglo ancestry (Allaire, 2013; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Madden, 2017). This disconnect furthers the divide between Indigenous communities and educational systems, by preventing a shared understanding and knowledge of perspectives due to unpreparedness of teachers on how to address particular contexts and needs of communities. While this theme occurred through the articles on identity, primarily those classified as ‘ignored identities’, three of the studies spoke specifically to this issue.

Centered in Canada, and again in response to the TRC report, Lisa Korteweg and Tesa Fiddler (2018), set out to understand how teachers and schools can begin the process of unlearning and decolonizing ways of teaching and instructing that were considered harmful and detrimental to the well-being of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students. This study took place in an Indigenous-settler teacher-educator partnership which focused on dialogue among stakeholders to develop a Bachelor of Education degree intended to improve pedagogies and instruction in decolonizing teacher learning. The authors found that for settler-teachers, those from European ancestry, often cited a rationale that they were unfamiliar with NA/IFN perspectives and therefore neither taught them, nor began to approach including these ways of knowing in their instruction. Korteweg and Fiddler noted that this was oft repeated, yet inexcusable.

The authors point out that teachers, and teacher educators cannot begin to disrupt colonial instructional practices without first understanding their own identity, as well as the embodied experiences of their students and their home communities. Through this particular study, the use of dialogue was the step towards achieving the later goal, but for a teacher to come to understand their identity, they must first recognize, “holistic and global values of teaching and learning for all children, shifting their own nascent and emerging teacher-identities toward a critical role to engage in reconciliation” (p. 270). While teachers may enter these spaces unaware of NA/IFN perspectives, these gaps of knowledge are not constant and can be altered through communication and dialogue.

Remaining in a Canadian context, Brooke Madden (2017) applies a theory of whiteness and epistemic violence to teachers’ understandings of their own identities and how it impacts instruction for their students and the curricular choices they make. By utilizing critical discourse analysis, Madden attempted to understand how teachers identified themselves in the role of teacher, and how these identities positioned themselves for Aboriginal/Indigenous students. The findings uncovered that once again, teachers and teacher educators did not instruct directly to these students’ perspectives due to claims of lack of knowledge and understanding of lived experiences. This lack of knowledge, which is rooted in colonialism by refusing to acknowledge the other, created the positioning of instruction in three ways: victim of racism, arbiter of authenticity, and rescuer.

Teachers who did not acknowledge their own positioning and place in Western educational systems were often pushed back against by students, which they cited as racism towards their Whiteness. These claims furthered an ignorance of power which centered on the individual acts, while not addressing the larger systemic issues which colonial structures created and maintained

in schools. The second position of arbiter of authenticity references how teachers move in and out of identities dependent upon situational needs. Teachers often react in binary ways of identity as being one or the other without acknowledging their power and privilege to move in and out of these spaces. While claiming authenticity, teachers in these identity spaces are actually able to manipulate power structures to their advantage. Finally, a third position of rescuer emerged in this study in which teachers claimed to understand what was “culturally appropriate” (p. 653) and therefore were able to make decisions that they believed would be in the best interest of the students. The author, however, points out that often teachers can often isolate Aboriginal perspectives by not including them in curricular materials and teaching them separately rather than inclusively, thus perpetuating gaps between NA/IFN students and settler-colonial educational institutions.

Madden points out that these three perspectives emerged through the discourse of teachers who instruct Aboriginal students in Canada and used these perspectives to further their understandings of colonial forces on education. She points out that decolonial teaching does not need to be in direct opposition to colonial structures but does need to acknowledge and move towards how these influences have shaped education while beginning to create new structures in this understanding. This starts with teachers recognizing their identity and positioning while recognizing the gaps between them and their students. However, due to the systemic nature of colonial education, even teachers who identify with members of their community find it difficult to balance identities in instructional spaces.

Specifically looking at science curricula and the dual identities of Hawaiian teachers, Franklin Allaire (2013) found that though individuals identify with the communities in which they teach, this does not always lead to effective instruction due to the structures that have been

established through Western and colonial systems. Utilizing teachers' life histories, Allaire attempted to demonstrate how Hawaiian teachers, particularly those in science classrooms balance their identities both as Hawaiian and a teacher and found a series of navigations between the two. Allaire describes the importance and salience participants in the study placed on their Hawaiian identities varied and had developed over the course of their lives and their lived experiences. This caused impediments to becoming a teacher for many because they were discouraged from pursuing these studies by institutions which did not value Hawaiian ways of knowing and perspectives of science content. This is reflected in the experience of many students cited throughout this chapter that are ignored or discouraged because of narrow views of instruction and understanding that focus only on Western and colonial perspectives.

Allaire pursues the idea that regardless of identity, teachers should recognize and adapt science curricula to the needs and understandings of the community in an effort to make instruction meaningful as systems, such as standards-based assessments, continue to re-marginalize NA/IFN and Hawaiian peoples. Teachers who identify in these ways must also re-evaluate their positioning and identities, according to Allaire, so as to authentically represent themselves as well as the curricular materials. He points out that while this may not solve the problems of misrepresentation in texts, it will aid in the navigation of difficult dualities of home cultures and educational spaces.

## **2.4 Discussion**

This review set out to answer a question asking how issues of identity of Native American and Indigenous peoples in elementary English/Language Arts curricula have been studied and researched. From the results of the search, analysis, and coding of existing studies, it can be stated



that very few examples exist which focus solely on English/Language Arts curricula. The majority of the resources compiled for this paper were centered in Social Studies, History, or Tribal Culture and Language classrooms. None of those reviewed occurred within elementary spaces, PreK-4, while most of the examples analyzed were centered in secondary spaces with a few middle school studies becoming available through the search criteria described above. The need for representation and the ability to see oneself in a text is vital, to student success for those who identify in NA/IFN communities.

This need goes beyond just replacing current curricular tools for ones that are more culturally relevant. Rather, curricula should become participatory and include students, families, and community stakeholders in their development to ensure accurate representation to further the benefits of seeing oneself in the classroom materials (Arviso, et al, 2012). Occurring out of a classroom space to develop a Tools for Life curriculum, Arviso and their colleagues stressed that the most effective way to ensure that identity representations are accurate and appropriate is to bring those groups mentioned above in from the beginning when developing and creating curricular materials. Brown and Au (2014) offer that, “the field of curriculum studies requires a complete conceptual turn from the existing metanarrative of U.S. curriculum history” (p. 377). Simply stated, how curriculum is written and chosen for classroom spaces must be scrutinized and altered to meet the needs of the students in the classroom.

The larger dissertation provides one example of how this is done by uncovering what steps are taken at North Mesa Elementary to not only problematize the curriculum that has been adopted, but how they are adapting, omitting, or replacing ineffective representations and supplementing them with local tribal knowledges. This work is imperfect and there are important aspects to consider, however these perspectives have been missing from the literature as shown in the results

of this review. This is but one example of this type of assessment of curriculum but can be applied to a larger understanding of appropriate and effective representations in instructional material.

However, this is a daunting and almost impossible task for many classroom educators. Commercially available, scripted curricula are the most common form of instructional material used in public schools today (Hill, 2016). Therefore, teachers must make the choice on how to instruct, speak to, and problematize representations of NA/I/FN identity when they are present in instructional materials, specifically in English/Language Arts curricula

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The results of this literature review confirmed initial findings from a previously enacted motivational study; there are few studies conducted to understand how Native American/Indigenous/First Nations perspectives are presented and discussed in elementary English/Language Arts curricula. The studies that do exist in the field tend to focus on older students, middle and high school, and are centered in Social Studies and History contexts. By doing so, these texts are placing these individuals temporally in the past, ignoring both contemporary representations and the lived experiences of students from these communities. This is not only hurtful for children of these communities by silencing these perspectives, but also maintains a false narrative of NA/I/FN peoples existing only in the past, thus perpetuating the settler ideologies that have been promoted for centuries.

However, there is worthwhile work going on in the studies that do exist. By foregrounding NA/I/FN identities and perspectives, individuals from these communities often feel empowered and validated, and thus academic, socio-emotional, and community measures are stronger than

when ignored. The work is not done. We as researchers and educators must come to better understand how teachers in both Native-serving and non-Native-serving schools approach and discuss these perspectives. These understandings can guide us to create a more affirming and culturally appropriate instructional space not only for NA/I/FN peoples but also for larger school and community groups. When we nourish the story, as Cajete (1994) states, we will nurture the person.

### **3.0 Motivational Work**

When students are taught utilizing curricular materials that are linguistically and culturally familiar to them, their chance of succeeding on school-based measures of achievement increases (Hill, 2016). However, many language arts curricula do not allow space for perspectives outside the dominant mainstream culture to be given equal time in instructional settings (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Semali & Kincheloe, 2011). This only serves to perpetuate instruction in the dominant culture's educational ideals and values (Grande, 2004). For Native American students, this is increasingly harmful as tribal understandings of learning, the environment, and ways of being are ignored or given positions of inferiority in classroom instruction (Anderson, 2012; Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010; Stanton, 2012).

During the interview process for the dissertation study, the teachers and the principal were asked if they believed the curriculum to be appropriate regarding representation and presentation of Indigenous perspectives. All answered that the various programs that were used were not appropriate, and they needed to supplement with materials and texts. The following chapter is a study enacted to determine and analyze representation of Native American and Indigenous perspectives foregrounded, or ignored, in school-based curricula. This work motivated in part the line of inquiry that became the larger dissertation study.

### 3.1 Significance of this Study

English/Language Arts educators are in a unique position to allow for diverse representations in instructional materials as they can provide space for such representation that has often been left out of educational settings (A. Wade Boykin, 2014; Tschida et al., 2014). Michele Mason and Gisela Ernst-Slavit (2010) state that students' ideals and understandings are often shaped by teacher talk, classroom instruction, and discussions that occur both structured and impromptu. In many Native American communities, however, tribal histories and understandings are limited to culture and language courses while almost completely absent from regular, core instructional time such as math, science, and specifically language arts (Rehyner & Eder, 2004; Tiller, 2001).

What is missing from many instructional settings is a core value of Indigenous knowledge, elaborated upon below, which values knowledges all aspects of one's world and environment (Battiste, 2008). Though each community and nation hold specific and unique perspectives, this understanding of Indigenous knowledge is accepted among many research and community members from these perspectives. Students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds come from communities where distinct and unique views of the world are understood to be the ways of being, and reducing knowledge to a set of skills and facts results in the elimination of different ways of knowing, removes understandings and processes necessary for many individuals to achieve academic success in said environment (McCarty, 2009).

Implementing an Indigenous understanding within the curriculum removes the essentialism of the mainstream, white middle-class understanding of education that has been in place in many instruction spaces (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). This understanding of essentialism can be defined as a set of unchanging, static beliefs that learning and education can occur in only

one way, using a finite set of skills (Semali & Kincheloe, 2011), typically in a white, Eurocentric, American viewpoint (Boykin, 2014).

Essentialism stems from a view of education that values mind over body: academic understanding and ways of being over the entirety of a person that students bring to school (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Semali and Kincheloe (1999) expand upon this by describing the privileges of whiteness that assume, “intellectual over experiential ways of knowing, mental abstractions over passion, bodily sensations and tactile understanding” (p. 30). By requiring students to adhere to a set of cultural, linguistic, and education standards that are in direct conflict of their own background and beliefs, students are systematically essentialized into the mainstream society. With an inclusion of different ways of knowing, all students, those in and out of the mainstream society, can benefit by gaining knowledge presented in new ways, possibly not considered previously.

## **3.2 Previous Research**

### **3.2.1 Native American Education**

In the United States, for many years schools were the tools of assimilation for Native American communities (Brayboy, 2005). Federal policy specifically stated that their salient feature was, “the concentration of all Indians on reservations, there to be educated, Christianized, and helped toward agricultural self-support” (Tiller, 2001). Today, schools are still looked upon with caution and reproach by many within Native American communities, and other cultural groups, as

the abolishment of the dormitory schools is a still relatively recent event (Reyhner & Eder, 2004; Tiller, 2001).

In a study of adult heritage language learners, Coryell et al. (2010) found that for many students who find themselves outside of the mainstream culture, exist in two worlds simultaneously. They are linked to their ancestors through heritage, history, and language, but find themselves in a modern society that is disconnected from that past. Therefore, the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (Charleston, 1994), explicitly presented the idea the education of Native American and Indigenous children must prepare them for both the world they are living in and the one that is to come, but it is vital that it also be rooted in historic and cultural perspectives.

Schools that provide opportunities for students to navigate between these two cultures, their historical and family culture and that of the mainstream school system, do so by providing opportunities to move between two often opposing viewpoints (Coryell, Clark, and Pomerantz, 2010). This has occurred through the students doing school in the ways expected of the larger, mainstream educational system, while still maintaining aspects of their culture and language that will aid in comprehension and execution of tasks.

While studying the effects of revitalizing culture and language programs for linguistically diverse students, Teresa McCarty (2009) found that education policies, specifically for those impacting Native American and Indigenous students, are most successful when they are designed, measured, and adhered to regarding how well they strengthen community-school relations

Similarly, the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (Charleston, 1994) established guiding principles for schools and educators to ensure success for Native American and Indigenous students. It is to be understood that the following guidelines should be used by all educators and administrators to aid in the success of all students:

- Increased student self-esteem and motivation to learn and excel.
- Elevated levels of parent, teacher, and student expectations.
- Improved academic performance.
- Energized school climate.
- Expanded community support and participation.

The Task Force found a direct relationship between students' understanding of their culture and their role in society as American citizens who are still considered 'others' in many spaces (Rehyner & Eder, 2004)<sup>5</sup>. This is also directly linked to greater academic success indicated by measurable education standards when compared to students who are not given the opportunity to see their place in society (McCarty, 2009; Rehyner & Eder, 2004).

Debbie Reese (2007) defines this cultural intuition as way of knowing as a reflection on one's own life and a recognition of their place in a community through understanding lived experiences within one's cultural group. Though students may live in a geographic location, they may not be fully immersed in the language and the culture of the larger community. For many Native American and Indigenous communities, the act of storytelling (Stanton, 2012), is one way to activate the communal memories where history, language, and culture are stored (Ballenger, 1997), therefore allowing for cultural intuition to be used as a tool.

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<sup>5</sup> Most recently, CNN labeling Indigenous populations as 'Something Else' when reporting the results of the 2020 presidential election (Pember, 2020).



### **3.2.2 Absence of Representation**

Overall, research has shown that there is a broad lack of Native American representation in educational contexts. In my search for information on representation in English/Language Arts materials, I was unable to locate any information on this specific inquiry. Therefore, I broadened my search to include articles focused on social studies and history, with one instance of using Native American contexts in the teaching of science concepts (Marley, Levin, and Glenberg, 2007).

According to researchers who have covered Native American and Indigenous perspectives in education (Brayboy, 2005; Rehyner & Eder, 2004), this gap can be attributed to Native understandings of education being considered inferior, and not appropriate for a student to succeed. Education was meant to bring Native American students into a white, American way of thinking and being (Brayboy, 2005; Tiller, 2001). While shifts in thinking have allowed for more culturally representative texts in elementary school classrooms, Native American and Indigenous stories are still absent from many forms of instructional space, particularly English/Language Arts.

Representations of Native Americans in instructional spaces appear primarily in history and social studies contexts (Anderson, 2012, Mason & Ernst-Slavit, 2010, Stanton, 2012). Mason & Ernst-Slavit (2012) found that in elementary social studies curriculum, Native American representations were shown as the ‘others’ in the story of American history. They were positioned as the other groups that were living on the land until the settlers came to the area. These perceptions are skewed towards a United States colonial perspective to show the history of how the country was formed, with very few examples of a balanced account from Indigenous perspectives (Anderson, 2012).

In her study on primary resources for social studies instruction, Christine Stanton (2012) described this as a hidden curriculum, by providing a narrative of power and prestige to one group while ignoring the contributions of another, the texts are placing value on the dominant historical perspective of the country. By omitting other cultural perspectives in favor of mainstream, white, middle-class contexts, the message being delivered is that this is the preferred or “true” way of viewing the world and other contexts do not belong in these spaces (Leavitt, et. al, 2015). Leavitt et al. found that when these contexts are omitted, Native American students have a difficult time finding their place in contemporary society, thus inhibiting their success on school-based measures.

This can be understood in large part to federal policy that was intended to remove aspects of culture from classroom spaces if they did not align with the mainstream culture (Tiller, 2001). This meant culturally relevant materials were not considered to be valid or necessary (Rehyner & Eder, 2004). As mentioned above, the articles that were found focused on social studies and history, with one instance of using Native American contexts in the teaching of science concepts (Marley et al., 2007)). The authors reported that when oral language techniques, like storytelling experiences, were used in place of self-read selections, higher results were measured on academic effects such as strategy and character type identification. A probable correlation between culturally appropriate and specific instruction and success on school-based measures.

### **3.2.3 The Benefits of Representation**

Tschida, Ryan, and Ticknor (2014) framed the idea that all students should be given the opportunity to see themselves in the texts used for instruction while studying methods to train preservice teachers in making literature choices. Through the experience of learners interacting

with texts that show characters familiar to their own contexts, students see that their cultural background is valued, and that their family contexts are useful to the process of learning.

The authors warn however that it is not enough to just insert characters from outside the mainstream culture into instructional materials. A conscious reexamination of how the instruction itself is occurring and using the values and methods of the cultures chosen to be represented to guide instruction must occur. This is often achieved, and most accessible, through utilizing the stories of the cultural group either intended to be represented, or the community from which the students are from (San Pedro et al., 2017; C. R. Stanton, 2012). Similarly, Tschida, Ryan, and Ticknor (2014), San Pedro, Carlos, and Mburu (2017), found that when students saw themselves in texts, it created not only academic success, but an increase in confidence during other school-based activities. This is most effectively achieved when information is delivered in familiar ways.

Several studies (Ballenger, 1997; Coryell et al., 2010; Kroskirty, 2009; Stanton, 2012) have shown that storytelling is often considered to be more than narratives for Native American communities, but a way to preserve important aspects of culture, including language (Stanton, 2012). It is also shown to be a valuable pedagogical tool (San Pedro, et al., 2017), that gains access to a historical way of understanding (Semali & Kincheloe, 2011) thus valuing a distinct and unique perspective on learning. Through the act of seeing oneself in instructional materials, students are given the opportunity for an awareness of self in a learning context, which will aid in content understanding, improved performances on school-based measures, and an affirmation that their cultural background is valued and has a place in education (Hill, 2016; Mills et al., 2016; T. San Pedro et al., 2017).

Implementing an Indigenous understanding within the curriculum removes the essentialism of the mainstream, white middle-class understanding of education that has been in

place in many instruction spaces (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Chela Sandoval (2000) referred to this context as the privation of history. Presenting histories and narratives through one perspective, that of the colonizers, reduces the unique and profound differences of subordinated groups as objects of observation and celebratory entertainment for Western consumption. This presents those individuals as “ideal servants” (p. 119) stripped of their own contexts and made to perform for the dominant culture. They are a supporting character in the narrative of domination by the groups in power. In educational instruction, this is done by stereotypical representation within texts and illustrations, while also limiting the study of other cultures and experiences to specific times of the instructional calendar (e.g., African American contexts in February and Native American perspectives in November).

This understanding of essentialism can be defined as a set of unchanging, static beliefs that learning and education can occur in only one way, using a finite set of skills (Semali & Kincheloe, 2011), typically in a white, Eurocentric, American viewpoint (Boykin, 2014). Essentialism in the context of this study stems from a view of education that values mind over body; academic understanding and ways of being over the entirety of a person that students bring to school (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Semali & Kincheloe (2011) expand upon this by describing the privileges of whiteness that assume, “intellectual over experiential ways of knowing, mental abstractions over passion, bodily sensations and tactile understanding” (p. 30). By requiring students to adhere to a set of cultural, linguistic, and education that are in direct conflict of their own background and beliefs, students are systematically essentialized and assimilated into the mainstream society. With an inclusion of different ways of knowing and participating in instructional spaces, all students, those in and out of the mainstream society, can benefit by gaining knowledge presented in new ways, possibly not considered previously.

For the study this chapter is based upon, two widely used third grade English/Language Arts curricula were analyzed to uncover and problematize issues of representation of Native and Indigenous peoples in curricular materials. They were chosen for the adoption in schools across the United States. The publishers of these texts, Houghton Mifflin and Harcourt schools are two of the larger producers of curriculum, and many classrooms are currently using their materials as a primary means of instruction. By looking at the number of instances that Native American contexts are present within widely used curricula and how these instances are framed, I attempted to create a more nuanced display of representation presented to students which was framed by the following research question:

- In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade strand of two frequently used commercially available English/Language Arts curriculum used in the United States, how many instances of Indigenous peoples are present within stories intended for instruction? Of these representations, what aspects of culture, knowledge, and power are present?

### **3.3 Methods**

#### **3.3.1 Representation**

For this study, I defined a representation to be any instance where a character is purported to be of Native American identity (individuals and groups who resided in what is now the United States, Canada, and Hawai'i prior to First Contact in 1492) in a context where that identity is central to the use or goal of the instructional material. For example, in a unit on fairytales and different interpretations of Cinderella, *The Rough-Face Girl* (Martin, 1992) would be analyzed

using the criteria described above. A story where a child is shown to be dressed in historically traditional plains dress for Halloween, but the focus is not on that representation would not be considered. Though the later example demonstrates an important perspective to be discussed more generally regarding appropriation and costume, it does not fit within the scope of this study.

Therefore, the analysis that occurred required a critical examination of each representation in the current context of the group it was intended to portray, framed against the backdrop of historical perspectives, and ways of social interaction, prior to first contact. This was conducted through an application of Brian McKinley Jones Brayboy's (2005) work on Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). Often considered a subcategory of Critical Race Theory, TribalCrit presents eight tenets from which to view issues and themes of CI. For this study, I employed the fifth tenet, which states, "The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens" (p. 434). This choice was made due to the nature of the curricula which was being analyzed. Storytelling as a way of knowing about the world, is a commonly held understanding among many Native and Indigenous groups. Those stories contained markers of a group's culture, the knowledge of the world, and transfer the power of knowing those specific contexts to those who hear the stories. English/Language Arts curriculum has historically been filled with variations of storytelling and require a sharing of information across texts and therefore this tenet was inherently one that could provide the most insight and understanding towards the meaning of a story.

When a representation was discovered in the various texts, the time period in which the representation was meant to occur, the geographic location depicted, and community contexts were used to provide meaning for the representation itself. For example, in *Invitations to Literacy* (Houghton Mifflin, 1996), the story was presented in a historical context in Northeastern Canada

and was a tale from the Micmac First Nation. As a curricular tool, the story was intended to serve as another literacy device for instruction. However, utilizing an Indigenous lens as described by Brayboy, it is made known that different groups used stories to describe natural phenomena such as weather. The table in Appendix B shows an organizational tool used during the analysis of the curricula which allowed for specific features to be listed for each of the representation. This allowed for viewing each instance through a CI lens framed in TribalCrit.

A second round of coding occurred utilizing Brayboy's fifth tenet for each of the representations specifically acknowledging the culture, knowledge, and power for each group. The table in Appendix B shows the coding structure utilized. Culture was defined as drawing attention to and foregrounding the tribal group that was intended to be represented, and their historical and contemporary positions in society. Once again turning to the story of how Snowmaker was taught a lesson, it is explicitly expressed that this is a tale from the Micmac tradition. Therefore, it was easy to determine where this story was situated in the history of the group, and how it could possibly still be used today.

The code Knowledge was defined as what message was trying to be conveyed in during instruction. The tale of Gray Wolf and Snowmaker is about an extended winter season, and the protagonist attempting to bring a change of seasons for the community to begin planting crops. The knowledge displayed in this story is based on explanations of natural phenomena such as weather patterns and events. As described by Marley, et al. (2007), science concepts are often taught alongside storytelling in Native and Indigenous communities as stories were the way to convey knowledge and understandings of the world. Therefore, while the use of this tale is intended to be a literary tool for English/Language Arts instruction, it can be understood to also be

a science lesson for this, and possibly other, groups. Knowledge in this instance refers to a science concept taught through a traditional means of storytelling.

Power was the most difficult feature of representation to acknowledge and qualitatively identify due to its nuanced nature. This feature is intended to understand whose power is being foregrounded by the use of the representation in the text. Specifically, is the use of the story, poem, or image intended to honor the context from which it originates by sharing the knowledge of that group? Or is it used as a tool to teach a skill, standard, or other means towards an assessable feature of instruction? To effectively understand power, I looked at culture and knowledge for each instance and attempt to view this feature in connection with the previous two. Acknowledging where the representation originated from and the knowledge that it was intending to convey provided a space in which to position the power of the representation as both an instructional tool, and a window into a cultural perspective that many within the cultural mainstream may not be familiar (Sims Bishop, 1990).

The final step of analysis occurred by looking at the knowledge gap (Goebel, 2004) that existed between the cultural mainstream for which the curricula was written, and the specific group, tribal or otherwise that was the intended subject of the piece. In *Reading Native American Literature*, Bruce Goebel defines a knowledge gap as any missing or misinformed perspectives of literature that hinders or denies a true understanding of the piece. Using this method for analysis, it was determined whose voice was being heard, whose was silenced, or if there was a deliberate, or unintentional silencing occurring within the use of the representation in instruction. This tied closely to the coding of power described above, as it required the researcher to look at intentions of inclusion against origins of the story or representation. There was an acknowledgement on my part as the researcher that I had to overcome my own knowledge gap between use and positioning.



While my experience teaching at North Mesa was an asset, my understandings were based in that community alone. I anticipated encountering other tribal group perspectives that did not necessarily match or agree with contexts that I was familiar, so additional research and knowledge finding was necessary on my part to effectively analyze the data I uncovered.

### **3.3.2 Materials**

The first round of coding included looking for these representations in the teacher's editions of two English/Language Arts curricula available within the university reading center, and that were both widely used in the metropolitan area surrounding the university; the curricula were *Storytown*, published by Harcourt School (2009) and *Invitations to Literacy*, by Houghton Mifflin (1996). These texts were chosen due to their accessibility and use within the university's teacher training programs. Attempts were made to obtain current versions of texts from textbook publishers, but requests made were turned away after a series of emails and speaking to many representatives within the publishing companies. At the beginning of the communication process, there was confusion as to who I should be talking to in regard to obtaining sample copies of the third-grade strands. As a former member of a curriculum adoption committee, I was aware that publishers were willing to send out entire Teacher Edition sets to prospective schools and districts.

The requests were framed with this idea in mind but informing the publishers that not only would I be looking at representations, but as an instructor in a teacher training program, I would be using the texts in my practice, as a way to introduce and prepare the student teachers on the materials they would be using once they received their certification and enter the profession. It was because of the varied uses that I would be implementing the texts, I was referred to representatives in K-12 departments, but then instructed to contact Higher Education, which led

back to individuals who worked with K-12 materials. In some instances, communication halted and never resumed by the sales representatives. Only one company gave me a direct response and rejected my request due to the publishers not wanting their materials used for work that may appear in academic journals (Personal communication, 8/6/2018). Upon review of the materials that were readily available it was determined that they would be acceptable for analysis due to their commercially created structures, and their similarity to materials currently used in local school districts.

These curricula followed a consistent themed structure, where each unit consisted of five, five-day sections centered around a central topic. Various reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing lessons occurred within each of the five-day sections. Day one is spent introducing the new topic through a read-aloud and previous knowledge exercise led by the instructor. Day two provides a short story to engage the students in the skills and overall theme of the unit, while day three is spent immersed in the main reading selection that the weeklong section is built around. Day four allows the students to practice their newly learned skills while reading an expository text, typically science or social studies text. Consistently, day five is spent on assessments measuring student knowledge and skill on the week's lessons. Throughout both curricula, there are consistencies with the types of stories told within each themed unit with two fiction main readings, one historical or historical fiction story, and one science or social studies reading. The similarities between the two curricula allows for reliability in analyzing the data as being consistent with common texts used for ELA instruction in many American third grade classrooms.

### **3.3.3 Findings**

#### **3.3.3.1 Representations in the curriculum.**

Across the two curricula, only eight representations of Native and Indigenous peoples were found in the main instructional parts of the materials, two in Storytown and six in Invitations to Literacy. In Storytown, students are given the opportunity, if they are placed at an advanced reading level, of reading a supplemental story about the Navajo Code Talkers and their role during the second World War. This is not part of the main instruction, and only assigned to students if time permits, according to the Teacher’s Edition of the text. In this curriculum set, the only other instance of a Native character being portrayed is within a retelling of the legend of Johnny Appleseed. The text states that, “The Native Americans welcomed him too” (Harcourt, 2009, p. 333) and showed an illustration of a male with a long braid in the hair, dressed in buckskin and holding a bow. This representation is highly problematic as it portrays all Native Americans wearing this clothing, with one hairstyle, and holding a tool used for hunting. The text implies that all Native groups that Johnny Appleseed encountered welcomed him onto their lands. No other information is presented, and students are offered this point without questioning the intricacies of various groups and interactions.

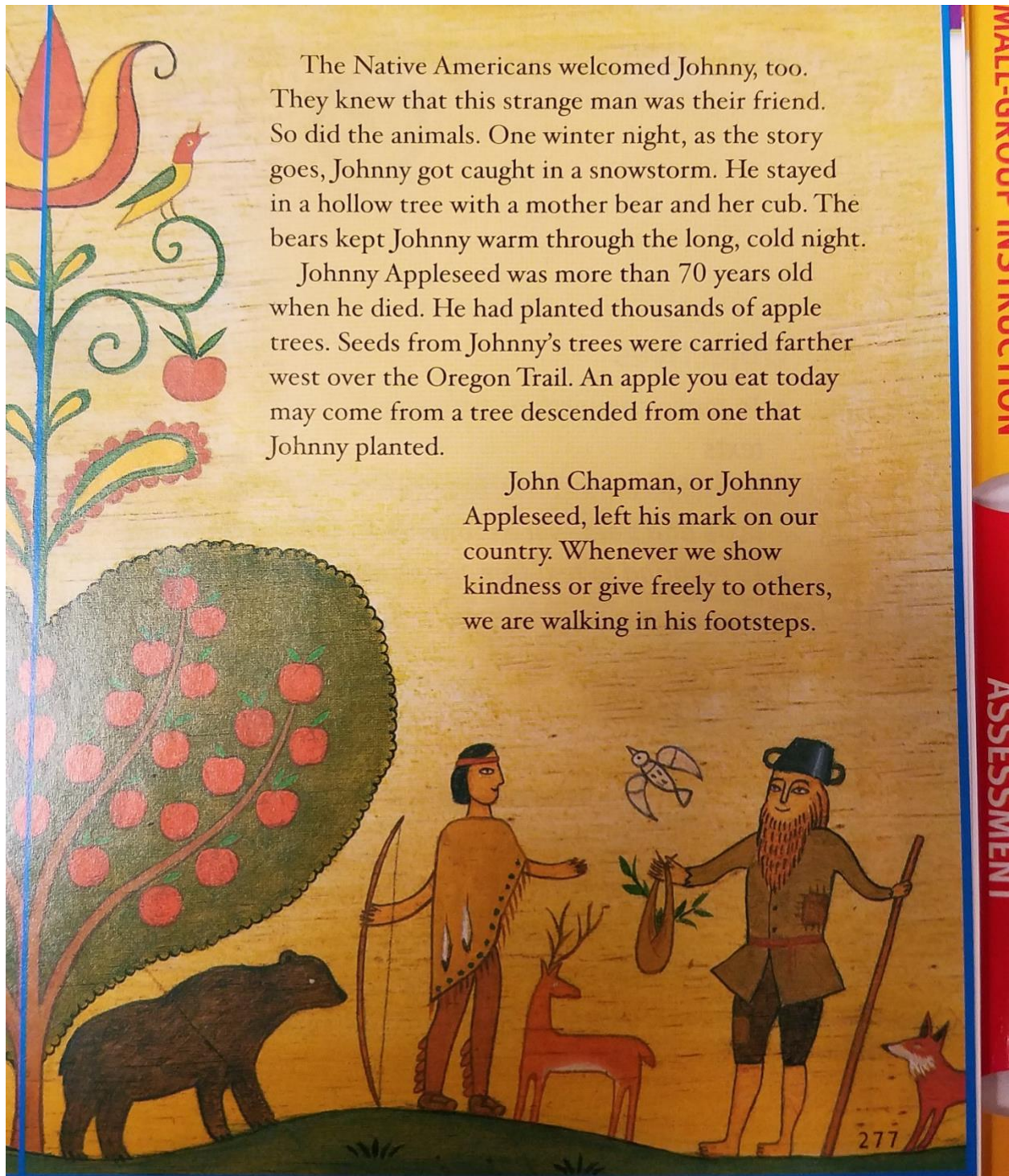


Figure 1 Johnny Appleseed (Harcourt, 2009, p. 1333)

Paulo Freire, as cited by Linda Tuhwai Smith (2012) in discussing literacy programs, stated, “name the word, name the world” which in indigenous contexts, means to apply historical

names to places, things, and peoples. In this instance in the text, no name is given for the individual depicted. They are not given a context, and their identity is reduced to something that should be viewed and consumed without question. This is a form of silencing by presenting an individual in a very basic, indeterminate representation intended to stand in for countless peoples who lived in a very specific historical time, and whose ancestors are members of society today. By not naming the individual, or providing context for the community, the text is providing only one narrative of the supposed event. If a specific group were named, students and educators could research the group to find a different perspective.

Of the two instances described above, only one appeared during a main instructional time in which all students are asked to participate. In addition, no female Native and Indigenous perspectives were presented, only male. This sends a message that only the males of these particular societal groups did anything of value to be given time and attention in instruction. Only one group is named by their tribal group, thus continuing the essentialization that all Native and Indigenous peoples can be considered in the same group further silencing the unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds of particular groups. *Invitations to Literacy* provides more quantitative representations, but this does not mean better understandings of Native and Indigenous perspectives.

Of the six representations, four were included in the main instructional pieces of this scripted curriculum and two were found in supplemental reading lists. In these lists, there are a variety of books that students can read, according to their reading level. It should be noted that these books do not come with the curriculum itself, and if the teacher chooses to include them, they must seek out and obtain them on their own. In addition, there is no indicator how students are to be placed in reading level groups. It is assumed that students are placed arbitrarily at the

discretion of the educator. There is a possibility that there is a standards-based measure, but that information is lacking as these texts are presented at the beginning of the book with little to no explanation of their inclusion, only a list of text for various ability levels. Only those four instances found in the Teacher's Edition were analyzed as the supplemental materials were not able to be obtained for this study.

During the first unit of instruction, the students read a version of the Three Little Pigs titled the *Three Little Javelinas*, by Susan Lowell (1992). In this retelling in the American Southwest, the javelinas meet a Native American woman collecting dry reeds from a cactus. The text provides only one utterance from this character, "ha'u", which the author explains as the way to say 'yes' in the language of the Desert People. The character is not seen again, nor is an explanation provided for who the Desert People is intended to represent. The Tohono O'odham people could possibly be the cultural group that this story is intended to portray. Tohono O'odham translates from ancestral tongue to English as Desert People, and their historical and contemporary location is in southern Arizona and Northern Mexico. These facts would lead one to believe that the woman in this story is from this cultural group, however, there is no indication in the text naming the group specifically.

The second little javelina walked for miles among giant cactus plants called saguaros (sa-WA-ros). They held their ripe red fruit high in the sky. But they made almost no shade, and the little javelina grew hot.



Then he came upon a Native American woman who was gathering sticks from inside a dried-up cactus. She planned to use these long sticks, called saguaro ribs, to knock down the sweet cactus fruit.

The second little javelina said, "Please, may I have some sticks to build a house?"

"*Ha'u*," (how) she said, which means "yes" in the language of the Desert People.

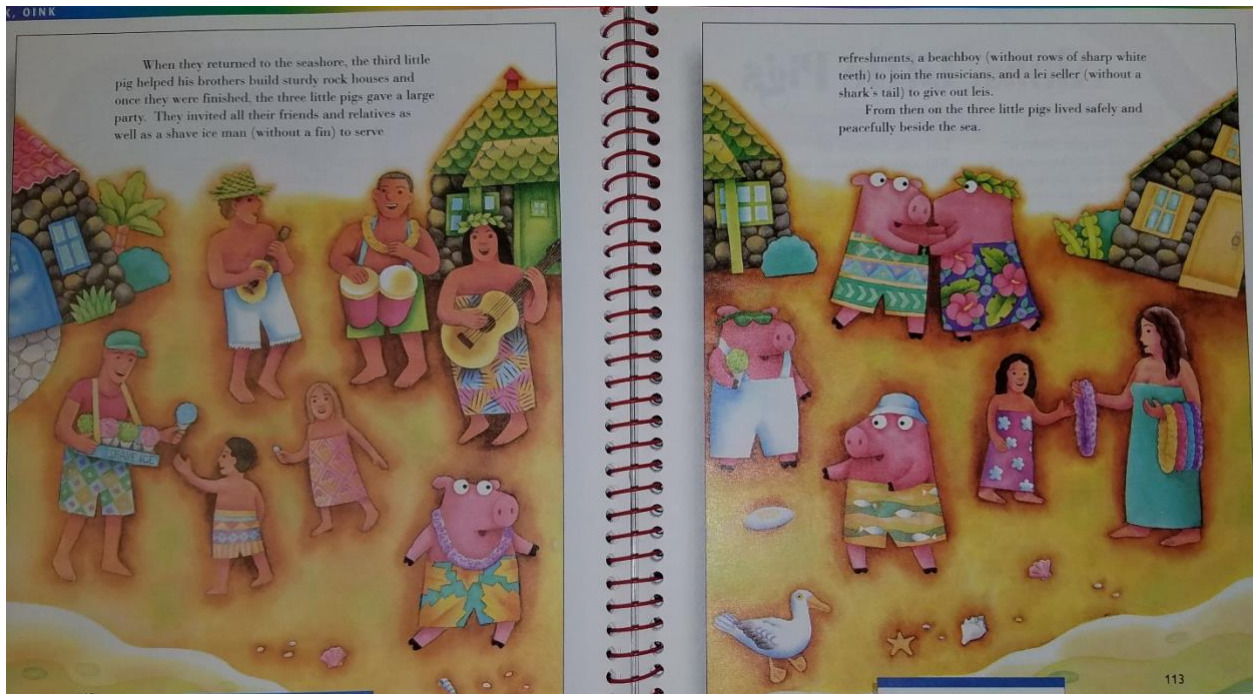
Figure 2 The Three Little Javelinas (Houghton Mifflin, 1996, p. 76).

Like the Johnny Appleseed example described above, by not specifically naming the group that the woman is intended to represent, the text is reducing the portrayal to a plot point while the identity is of little consequence. The woman is an object that provides a need for the main characters, and when they obtain what they want, she is no longer an important part of the story. This aligns with Western understandings of education that one narrative is important, and others are silenced or disregarded after they have fulfilled their usefulness (Sandoval, 2000). A CI stance would provide context for that individual and why they were collecting the reeds in the first place. This would provide the Indigenous lens described by Brayboy (2005) which would then provide new meaning for the story. While not taking away from the plot of the story, it would provide another perspective as to why the characters perform in such away. However, without identifying the individual, these perspectives are lost. This also occurs when individuals are portrayed in entertaining ways for the consumption of the reader, with little to no discussion on the origins of the representations and how they are positioned historically and contemporarily.

Later in that same unit, another variation of the Three Little Pigs is presented, this time in Hawai'i. While there are no specific instances of Native and Indigenous representations, there are multiple characters depicted in floral garments and wearing leis during a celebration, which traditionally have specific ceremonial uses. This representation can be viewed as a coopting of tradition, but this statement itself becomes problematic as the intersections of traditional tribal culture and mainstream assimilation have been blurred in this very specific context. Since the United States took control of the series of islands from other colonizing nations and forced the land and the people it into statehood, there has been a blending of traditional tribal cultures and contemporary American contexts to create new forms of dialogue, dress, and tradition. This example appears briefly at the end of the text. More research would be required to understand the



use of floral prints in historical settings, contemporary Hawaiian uses, as well as American uses. Due to the complex nature of this representation, this occurrence of representation was noted as needing more data to make an effective analysis on the portrayal, but was still included in this study as being an instance of an often misrepresented group in educational contexts.



**Figure 3 The Three Hawaiian Pigs (Houghton Mifflin, 1996, p. 112-113)**

Towards the end of the curriculum, there is a poem written by Alonzo Lopez, illustrated by Tomie dePaolo, which speaks to Native American tribal dancing. The illustration shows seven individuals with their back to the reader. Everyone is wrapped in a blanket, has their hair in a long braid and the five in the middle are holding torches. On either end, the characters are holding a stick with feathers attached. Again, there is no indication if this is a specific group being represented, or if it is just a general depiction of Native Americans. No information is provided

about the type of dance, which would inform the how and why of performance, which could be gendered for specific tribal groups.

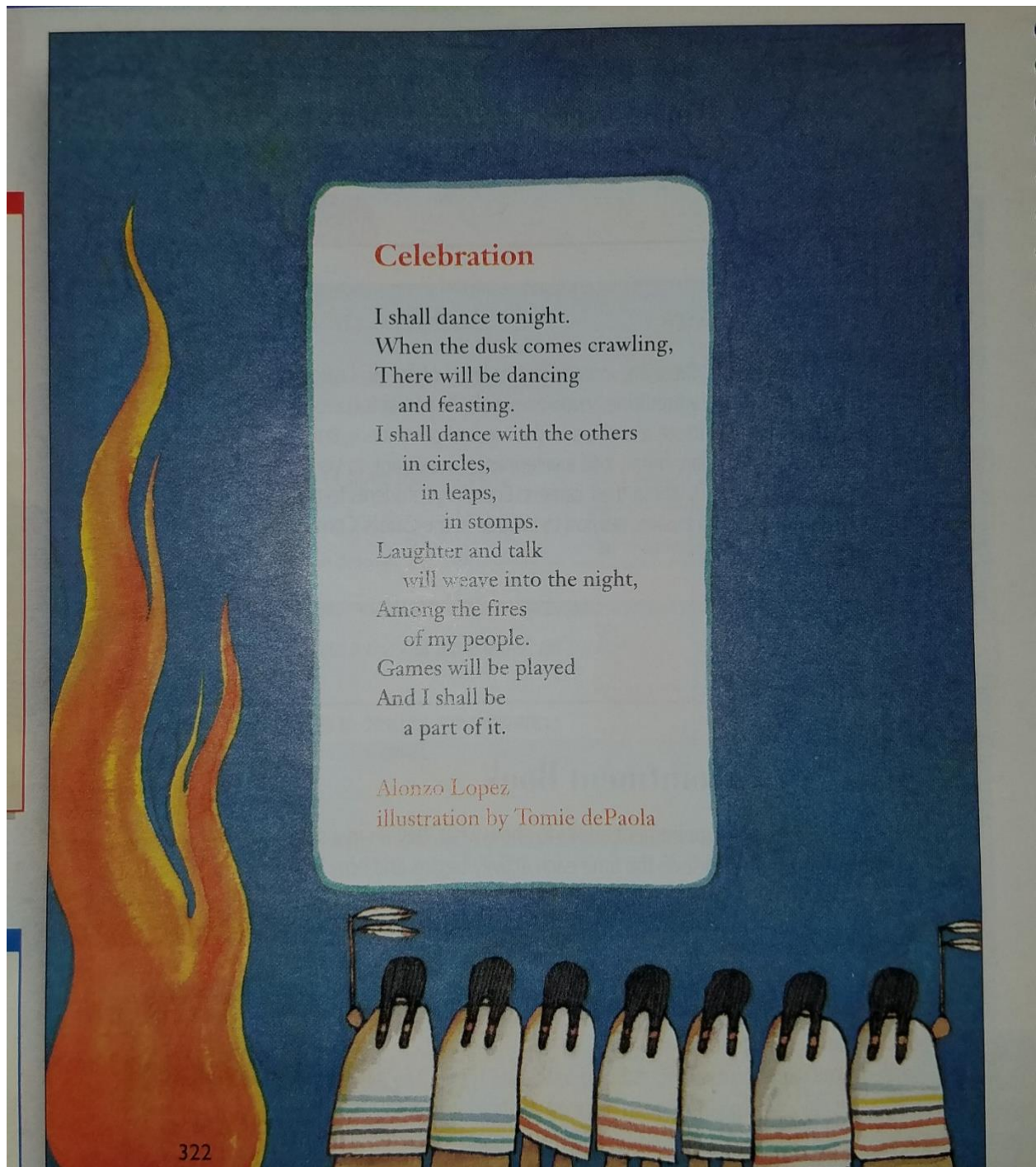


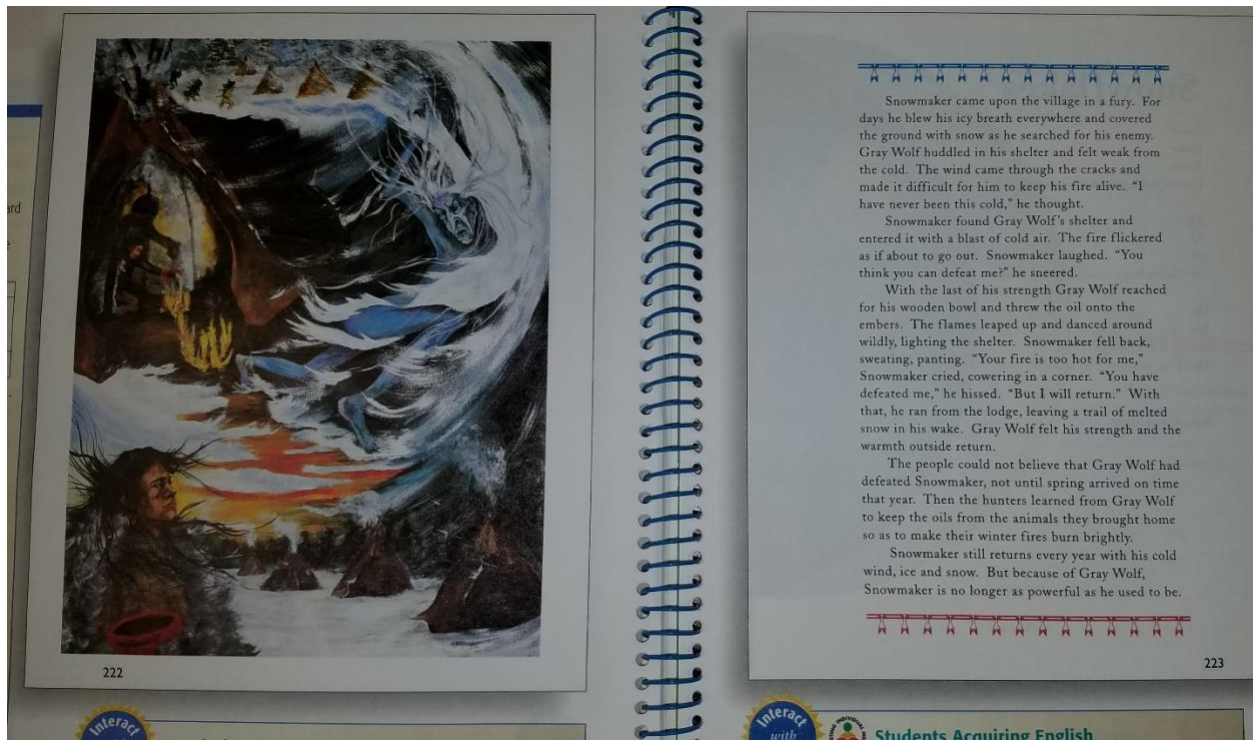
Figure 4 Celebration (Houghton Mifflin, 1996, p. 322).

Upon researching the author further, it was found that Alonzo Lopez is a member of the Tohono O’odham tribal group, discussed above in section concerning *The Three Little Javelinas*. It can be theorized that Lopez held discussions with the illustrator dePaolo which informed the illustrations and could be a representation of the author’s cultural context. Conversely, the publishers of the book could have also commissioned dePaolo to illustrate the poem and he and Lopez could never have spoken about what should be in the representations. This leads again to the point made previously about silencing perspectives.

Within the text, there is no space given for information about the author or the context from which the poem emerges. Often, in these types of curricula, space is given for short biographies about the creators of the texts and pictures which provides insight into the lives of the author or illustrator. In this curriculum in a previous unit, there is a section about Tomie dePaolo which allows the reader a glimpse into a family tradition of baking bread with relatives, as it related to a particular story in the text. However, for ‘Celebration’ there is no mention of Alonzo Lopez’s family tradition, motivation for this poem to be written, or any information about Lopez. By omitting this information, the publishers have determined that the author’s background and contexts are not important, and the use of the poem can be done so without vital pieces of information and understanding of the individual, or their tribal group.

Finally, in a unit on weather, a legend from the Micmac First Nation, was included to tell the story of Snowmaker and how he was taught a lesson. The Micmac tribal group’s traditional lands are located in what is now Canada and are considered First Nations but are included in this analysis because this is the only instance where a tale was taken from a group and given space for the entire story to be told from that traditional standpoint. The story presents two characters, Snowmaker and Gray Wolf. Both are gendered male and are the only humans present. There are

animals portrayed throughout the tale, but they are not humanized in any ways. There is ancillary mention of other people, but they are only given one line of dialogue and not present in the illustrations. Gray Wolf shows his bravery by convincing Snowmaker to return to the north for the change of seasons.



**Figure 5 How Snowmaker Was Taught A Lesson (Houghton Mifflin, 1996, pp. 222-223).**

This story can be considered exemplar that could be used within a curriculum to show diverse perspectives and varied ways of presenting information. While this story is included in Language Arts texts, connections can be made to science topics on whether as many Native and Indigenous groups use storytelling as a means of describing the physical world (Aikenhead, 1997). Educators have the opportunity then to pursue other ways of describing various experiences of other groups around weather, or how individuals overcome obstacles to benefit their community as Gray Wolf did in the tale. This can also be considered an exceptional example of representation

within instructional materials because the individuals are named, their lived experiences are presented as part of the story showing their importance to the narrative, and the dress and performance are specific to that group. Unlike other representations described above, this is the only one across the two curricula that present representations of Native and Indigenous people in such a way honors and respects their perspectives, while not commodifying their tale for an outside audience. However, both characters are gendered male, therefore again, minimizing the contributions of female, or other non-binary individuals, to the society of the tribal group.

### **3.4 Discussion**

In a set of curricula which contains numerous stories and examples from which to teach standards and literacy skills, the number of representations of Native and Indigenous people are minimal and essentialize individuals to wearing buckskin, braiding their hair, and performing in stereotypical ways through a western, colonial gaze. Despite Gray Wolf residing in a geographic location different from the other examples, the visual portrayal is similar, but still holds unique, tribally specific dress which speaks to both honoring the Micmac traditions, but making the material familiar for culturally mainstream, white middle class, children. This allows the students to affix a gaze onto these others that mimics their own understanding but does not require them to problematize or question their own perceptions of the individuals portrayed.

What is more problematic is that there was only one specifically identified female in all of these examples, the woman collecting reeds in *The Three Little Javelinas*. In this portrayal she is performing a task of collecting and then forgotten in the text. The male characters throughout the texts are given exciting and heroic actions that should be admired, from the Navajo code talkers to

Gray Wolf standing up to Snowmaker. This can be seen as a maintenance of males being given more responsibility in the world, while women are left to tasks of the home which are not glorified and not given the respect of representation in texts. This view of gender roles is a western colonial perspective that was not present in many tribal groups pre and post contact (Lajimodiere, 2013) Without deeper literary analysis it can be assumed that these moves are done deliberately to maintain hegemonic understandings of women and family roles that are often found in white middle class contexts (Sandoval, 2000).

Overall, there is a lack of cultural and gender representation in mainstream scripted English Language Arts curricula. Textbook publishers do little to offer options for educators to bring perspectives into instructional spaces from outside the cultural mainstream. Students from these diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds deserve to see themselves in the text, but also children from the cultural mainstream can benefit from these perspectives as well (Sims Bishop, 1990). It is the role of educators to recognize the silencing that occurs in instructional spaces, and move towards a more robust, inclusive way of viewing the world. Teachers in many schools in the United States are already overworked and held to rigorous standards of assessment. While efforts should be made at a larger social level, federal, state, and all the way down to the individual districts, educators are the ones who can enact real valuable change. It is a daunting task, and further research must be conducted to find valuable, meaningful ways of pushing back against systems of power within instructional spaces.

This line of research also lends itself towards inquiry into how many perspectives are presented outside of the cultural mainstream and what those representations are. Looking at each curriculum individually and classifying each story, poem, and other literacy tools would provide insight into whether the representations uncovered in this study is typical of historically

marginalized populations, or if this number is unique to Native and Indigenous peoples. A similar analysis should occur on the number of gendered representations to uncover whose perspectives are valued by their presence in the texts. This analysis would not be limited to the male/female binary, but also include all representations, including ungendered individuals within the text (e.g., absence of pronouns when identifying characters).

The findings of lack of representation are not unique to English/Language Arts curricula and instructional materials, though no other studies in this content area could be found at the time of the compiling of literature. Issues of culture, knowledge, and power have been exposed in social studies and history contexts. Anderson (2012) analyzed Arizona state standards for social studies and compared them to the state of Washington. Both states provided one-sided perspectives of United States history, that of European Americans and settlers, while minimizing Native and Indigenous perspectives. In addition, both states failed, according to the author, in promoting critical thinking about Native American and European American relations in historical contexts. Anderson also identified standards as either being Contributory towards Native and Indigenous perspectives, Progressive, or Discordant. Arizona's standards provided more of a Contributory or Progressive understanding (43% of total standards each) While 50% of Washington's standards were viewed as Discordant towards these relations.

As with the silencing of perspectives by their omission or their marginalization in English/Language Arts materials, Anderson spoke to a "code of silence" (p. 506) which ignored controversial aspects of U.S. History, which can be inferred to be the extermination, assimilation, and subjugation of Native and Indigenous peoples by the United States government and military. In the texts analyzed in this study, this silence was maintained through the absence of these interactions on any level. Apart from Snowmaker and Gray Wolf, all other representations were

intended to be gazed at without offering information as to the lived experiences of the individuals who were being portrayed. The Micmac tale, while offering knowledge of understandings of weather, was also devoid of context therefore ignoring issues of oppression that have kept other similar takes out of mainstream curricula.

Another issue uncovered by this study, is the lack of primary sources within the representations used in these two curricula, discovered while assessing Social Studies materials and instruction, found that perspectives offered to the students were based on the mainstream culture's understanding of history and current lived experiences. Stanton (2012) however, elaborated upon the finding that such positioning is subtle, and not an overt maneuver by educators and textbook publishers. Rather than actively speak out against other perspectives, or even denouncing the mainstream as being only one sided, the act of ignoring others' voices accomplishes the task of silencing. The author continues by providing a call to action for educators and researchers to acknowledge the diversity within and between Native and Indigenous groups to avoid essentialization and, "demonstrate historical and contemporary cultural understandings" (p. 346). These understandings and perspectives can also be applied to materials chosen for English/Language Arts curriculum by avoiding representations such as the one found in Johnny Appleseed described above and provide various stories from a wide range of Native and Indigenous groups to speak to a wide array of materials available for instruction.

### **3.5 Limitations**

The greatest limitation of the study was the number of resources available for analysis. In the initial proposal, it was stated that five curricula would be obtained and reviewed. However,



there was difficulty in obtaining current texts from publishers that could be used for this analysis. One representative informed me that their company did not make their curriculum available for this type of study (Personal Communication, 8/6/2018). No other reason was provided other than they did not want anything published about their product. It was at this time that the decision was made to use the materials available in the University of Pittsburgh's Reading Center. While both were older materials, published in 1997 and 2009, they are similar to materials currently being used in local school districts. These similarities (story type, instructional delivery, vocabulary) were appropriate enough for the inclusion of the materials in this analysis.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The study contained in this chapter uncovered and problematized representations within third grade English/Language-Arts of Native and Indigenous perspectives. What few representations did exist essentialized all Native and Indigenous groups into one type of portrayal with little variation on a stereotypical Plains tribal performance and dress. More surprising is the lack of representation outside of a male perspective. The one instance of a female character showed her performing a mundane task similar to a colonial understanding of a woman's role in a family structure.

More research is needed to address these dangerous portrayals and how they impact not only students from these particular cultural and linguistic groups, but also the messages they send to individuals from the cultural mainstream. While individual educators have the opportunity to disrupt these narratives and are better suited to address these issues, increasing pressure to perform standards-based instruction limits their ability. More support is needed from administrative

individuals as well as changes coming from state and federal agencies. For individuals and groups who have been essentialized and oppressed through centuries of colonization and assimilation, texts need to be responsive to their diverse and meaningful perspectives. Not only will these students benefit from such representation, but students from all groups can experience a more rich and meaningful educational experience through diverse perspectives.

The larger dissertation study, which was motivated in part by the findings in this chapter, reflect the need for more culturally diverse and responsive classroom materials. The teachers and administrator at North mesa all state this directly and speak to the curricula used at the school as lacking adequate representations. The number of and perceived quality of their texts is unknown and a limitation of the study. This chapter, however, provides a deeper and more nuanced look in to commercially produced and widely adopted curricula, akin to the ones in use at North Mesa.

## **4.0 Methods**

In my previous research, I demonstrated that commercially available, scripted English Language Arts curriculum are not adequate, and often not appropriate, for Native American, Indigenous and/or First Nations (NA/I/FN) populations. Their exclusion from instructional materials silenced perspectives and perpetuated a colonial, hegemonic power balance in classroom spaces. In both the existing literature and my own prior research, a theme repeatedly surfaced regarding how teachers and educators need to supplement core curricular materials, however how and with what was not always clear. As a teacher educator and former classroom teacher, I recognize that these skills are not often taught in teacher training programs as course work is often created and enacted in similar power dynamics as early childhood education materials, ones that favor a white middle-class culture over all others.

Therefore, this study set out to understand how – in the context of a state funded school whose student population is primarily Native American – teachers, administrators, staff and community members make sense of a state approved curriculum while also bringing local knowledges and perspectives into instructional spaces.

### **4.1 Context**

North Mesa Elementary School is part of a publicly funded school district located on the reservation of a constitutionally sovereign Tribal Nation. The reservation is located in the northern most part of New Mexico on part of the Tribe's ancestral lands. Located in a remote and not often

traveled to part of New Mexico, North Mesa Elementary is a school with a unique story to tell, but one that is rarely heard. The staff and community strive towards preparing students for success in whatever paths they may choose post-secondary instruction. Some students continue their education off reservation, others begin work for tribal governance, while others join the military, and some start families. However, these efforts to ensure the preparedness of the next generations is often silenced or diminished by performance markers or standardized test scores.

Located in the capital of the Nation, the District of North Mesa serves the community, as well as the small town just outside the reservation borders. According to the 2018 State issued report card, the most recent report available, the district is 95% Native American. The document does not provide information about tribal affiliations. 19% of the student population is considered English Language Learners (ELL) and 100% is considered economically disadvantaged. The district was given a score of D, while the Elementary was designated F. The state assigns these grades by weighing the school's achievement on NAEP assessments, their accountability, which takes into consideration grades and graduation rates, and teacher qualifications, measured as credentials held by the teachers in the school.

As it is funded by the state of New Mexico, the school is required to participate in standardized assessments and held to the same performance standards as all schools in the state's public education system which influences the grades described above. Since the inception of No Child Left Behind in 2002, North Mesa has been classified as a Restructuring II school by the state, meaning they have not met performance standards on standardized assessments, and therefore receive additional funding and increased scrutiny, in an attempt to raise test scores. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), they are labeled as More Rigorous Intervention (MRI) according to the 2018 document described above. Throughout the years, attempts at improving

performance have included after-school and summer programs aimed reteaching and reinforcing skills, additional reading and math-based programs in the school, as well as additional trainings and professional developments for the teachers and staff. In my time as a classroom educator at North Mesa, I participated in many of these programs and each school year brought about a new method of instructing, tracking, and intervening for my students.

However, North Mesa has engaged in other academic efforts that are not always recognized in these measures and funding requirements. These approaches center on the inclusion of local stories, contexts, and teaching methods from community members. Culture and Language courses are required of all students in the schools across the district which provide grammar, language usage, storytelling, and cultural significance in instructional settings. In the past, these classes have existed as separate from core curriculum, treated often as an elective, or extra class. In recent years however, there has been a greater focus on bringing tribal contexts into all aspects of instruction specifically at the elementary school. This effort requires collaboration and implementation across school personnel and community stakeholders thereby changing not only what is being taught in elementary classrooms, but also how knowledge and information is presented.

As a former educator at North Mesa Elementary, I was aware of this change in delivery through my ongoing connections with context, but not aware of the specifics of how teachers and administrators were implementing these connections to local contexts into educational spaces. These efforts make North Mesa an excellent context for better understanding how public schools can better serve NA/I/FN students. Research into how an Indigenous serving school made local knowledge and contexts connected to classroom instruction in a public school is a perspective missing from published literature and teacher training programs. The overarching goal for this study is twofold first focusing on the telling of a story that has yet to be heard regarding culturally

relevant and responsive education for NA/I/FN students; and second, an opportunity to gain knowledge on how to better prepare teachers for the instruction of populations of diverse learners.

## **4.2 Study Aims**

This study aims to answer the question of how the school is preparing the students for success that are not indicated by state reported data, and how this is achieved through the collaboration of multiple entities both within and outside the walls of the school. Secondly, the study will look to the steps that are taken by administrators, teachers, and staff to ensure the successes mentioned above. From this, strategies, methodologies, and theories will be developed that will aid in teachers, not only in Indigenous serving schools, but a broader scope within instruction, that will inform how to approach representations within curriculum. Using English Language/Arts texts and other instructional resources as an entry point for this study, a better understanding of how educators assess and implement resources based upon their relevance, value, and instructional merit will be developed for use by pre and in service teachers to look critically and culturally at the materials used in their daily practice.

### **4.2.1 Research Questions**

This study aims to primarily answer the following research questions centered on instruction and curricular materials used at North Mesa Elementary.

- How does an NA/I/FN-serving public-school design and negotiate a culturally responsive ELA curriculum?

- How is this measured?
- How is this achieved through collaboration with entities both within and outside the walls of the school?
- What specific steps are taken by school members (i.e.: administration, teachers, and staff) to enact and reinforce these curricular approaches within the school setting
  - What policies are put in place by administration? What negotiations occur?
  - How do teachers enact and create pedagogy/curriculum that addresses these goals?

During the planning process and through reading participant survey responses, explained below, it was determined that children’s literature and similar texts were a key tool used by the classroom teachers in making instruction more culturally relevant and appropriate. The role literature takes on in instructional spaces is confirmed through the prior research shared above that motivated this study.

The lack of representations in texts does not mean that there is an absence in published children’s literature available today. In the past few decades, working alongside the increase in social media, more texts have been written, illustrated, and published by Indigenous authors, illustrators, and companies. Organizations such as the American Indian Library Association and American Indians in Children’s Literature, as well as publishing imprints such as Heartdrum, have increased the presence of Indigenous literature in spaces available to a larger population, more than just the communities that are producing this work.

With this wide range of texts available to students and teachers, most instructional spaces are still not including texts of this nature. The following questions were developed to

appropriately analyze and include the role of children's literature and texts into the larger study through a literature review that is strengthened by teacher responses in the surveys and interviews.

- What are current trends within commercially available children's books (ages 3-8) created by and for Indigenous populations?
  - How can teachers use these representations in classrooms?
  - How might these texts be used for a wider audience outside of these communities, in order to support knowledge for Indigenous populations?

This review, analysis, and write up can be found in a later chapter. The results show that there is an ever-increasing number of resources available when compared to trends in publishing in the past few decades, but there is still a gap in understanding of how teachers can implement these texts for instructional use. A review of resources was conducted to respond to this research question, the methodology of which is explained later. The information that was found was subsequently affirmed through the responses provided by the participants of the study.

With these research questions established, a path to understanding was laid out to not only reinforce the work that the teachers and staff of North Mesa Elementary have been doing for many years, but to build an understanding towards how teacher education programs can incorporate these perspectives and methodologies. Later in this chapter, I will expand upon the process of data collection that occurred to answer these research questions.

### **4.3 COVID and Administrative Changes**

Like all aspects of life, this study's conception, implementation, and completion were directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is ongoing at the time this work is being



published. Original plans for this study that were drafted in late 2019 included traveling to the school site for recruitment and first round interviews. The remaining would have been conducted online, but it was intended that some of the initial research would be done face to face. However, just weeks before the proposal for this study was to be presented to committee, how we went out about interacting with others in our daily lives changed, and the methods for this study began to shift to accommodate a new way of conducting research and education in general.

In March 2021, once a rhythm had finally been found at North Mesa, I reached out to the school board, following the guidance of North Mesa's principal, to introduce myself and seek approval for conducting this study. Within a week, I was contacted by the Superintendent asking for more details concerning the study, the impact it would have, and the steps I would take due to the protective nature of the Nation regarding instruction and research within in the community. I responded with documentation and synthesized writings explaining work that I had done in the district as a teacher, as well as the Milestone studies I had already completed. He offered to take it to the board on my behalf due to the busy nature of their meetings. However, within a few days he discovered that he alone could grant permission and he did.

Shortly thereafter surveys were distributed to the staff and parents/guardians of the students of North Mesa, however, only four responses were received, and no one was interested in being interviewed. Ms. Irene, the principal of North Mesa, agreed that the end of the school year was not the best time to try and begin this study, and we would try again in the fall when school reconvened. During the summer months, the superintendent's contract was terminated, and a new person was hired to fill that position. Again Ms. Irene and I met to discuss how we should approach the new administration and I reached out to the new superintendent offering to meet with her to discuss the study and a possible start date. A response to an initial email was returned, but no further

communications were offered despite many follow up messages that I sent over the next two months.

There was a consideration that the study would shift from a case study to a more comprehensive review of literature available to mass markets and if I were able to interview anyone, those conversations would serve as a supplemental data point to what was uncovered in the search. However, Ms. Irene wanted to continue the study as planned and made the decision to approve it for her school building and to proceed as soon as possible. She cited the reason that this study had been approved by multiple superintendents over the years and that the turnover of the position should not delay the study anymore. In addition, she felt strongly that this study had the potential to support and guide the school community. Finally in November 2021, I began the data collection process, and the study began in earnest. However, because of the challenges in doing site-based research, and based on early data analysis, I did decide to also explore how mass-market literature related to the findings from the site-based case study.

#### **4.4 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framing of TribalCrit was explained in great detail in the first chapter, but it is important to revisit a few key points here. Throughout this and motivational studies, the ideas of Culture, Knowledge, and Power were used to code and understand various pieces of data to better understand representations of NA/IFN peoples in curricular materials. These ideas of power of identity move to inform this research by centering individuals in texts as being either part of a larger community living in the spaces and contexts that have defined those peoples; or does the representation provide something to gaze upon from the outside without a deeper understanding

of the individual? These points were revisited when understanding how a school on reservation lands developed a culturally relevant pedagogy and plan for instruction.

Because of Brayboy's (2005) centering of education in local contexts, and Grande's (2004) ideas of identity as power that can lift up or become preyed upon, this work is informed by questioning how teachers present and talk about representations and what steps they take to ensure they are utilizing effective and appropriate instructional materials. Therefore, the issues of race and representation explained in this section and the previous theoretical sections are a necessary framing devices that have continued to influence not the second round of coding concerning culture, language, and power, but the literature used in these instructional spaces.

#### **4.5 Data Collection**

Early in the Milestone process, I began to consider what my role in a study such as this should be. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation document, I am a cultural and linguistic outsider to this community. I claim no Indigenous identity and recognize how my racial background has afforded me power and opportunities not available to all peoples. I questioned whether I had a right to ask these questions and seek out these knowledges. Before the COVID-19 global pandemic changed the way education and research is conducted, I traveled to the reservation to meet with former students and to consult with two tribal members who I had worked with at the school to discuss my concerns about this work.

In separate conversations about the possibility of researching culturally relevant practice my positionality as an outsider was acknowledged by all parties, but an understanding that this work hasn't been done in this community and there was a need for it to be done was an agreed

upon conclusion. Over the years, the Tribal Nation has closely guarded many aspects of the culture and language, and rightfully so, to ensure that those things sacred to the people remain so and are not co-opted by outside forces. This is due to years of forced relocation, attempts at assimilation, and the decimation of their culture and language by federal and church forces that have occurred within reservation boundaries. Therefore, to pursue carefully, and appropriately in answering these questions, I consistently conferred with, and sent drafts of my findings, to these individuals to check for accuracy and their correct use of contexts.

#### **4.5.1 Recruitment**

As explained in the next section, there were multiple ideas of how to go about collecting data on what teachers and staff are doing in schools that ranged from meeting and interviewing in person, completely through video conferencing methods, or some combination of both. Once approval was granted through members of district administration, I attended a staff meeting of the North Mesa, via Microsoft Teams educators to explain previous research, the goals of this study, and how I would go about collecting data for use not only to meet the requirements of the dissertation portion of my degree, but also a data point for the school. As part of the Restructuring II and MRI improvement plans, the results of this study were written and approved by the school board and subsequently submitted to the state, to show that the school was taking steps to improve academic achievement and student performance. This study became more than a paper to be written, but an important piece of North Mesa's plans for student success.

Following a staff meeting held on Microsoft Teams, surveys were distributed to the teachers and the staff. Each group of employees were sent distinct surveys because the type of interviews would be different due to the various jobs they performed and their interactions with

curricular materials<sup>6</sup>. Anyone who filled out the web-based document would indicate if they were interested in being interviewed, and everyone was entered into a raffle for a gift card, funded by a University of Pittsburgh's School of Education research grant. It was also made known that each person who agreed to be interviewed would be compensated financially for their time, also funded by the grant mentioned above. The results of the survey were used to inform discussions and questions during the interview process and not considered a separate data point. This was done to ensure that the information gathered was taken from careful thought and response during virtual meetings rather than brief bits of information entered online.

#### **4.5.2 Interview Process**

Teachers would be interviewed three times following the Seidman (2013) method of qualitative interviewing. The first session was spent getting to know the teachers and their background as educators and their knowledge on culturally relevant practices. The second interview focused on curricular materials, the decisions teachers make when including stories and texts into their practice, and how the goals of the school's administration influence these decisions. The third interview was primarily asking about community relationships and practices, and how local contexts and knowledges are integrated into practice. All of the interviews were conducted over Zoom and recorded. The audio files were then sent to a transcription service and returned in Word documents for ease of use in analysis. This was funded through the same School of Education grant. Follow up questions were sent via email and collected through google surveys.

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<sup>6</sup> This study was submitted to and approved by the University of Pittsburgh's IRB process and recruitment and data collection, analysis, and dissemination of information remained in compliance throughout the duration of the study.

All data, recordings, transcriptions, and communications were stored on a cloud-based, password protected storage system provided by the University of Pittsburgh. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could remove themselves at any time, wherein they would decide what would happen with their data. Five teachers filled out the survey, but only four indicated they wanted to be interviewed. All four teachers completed the three interviews and were thus compensated for their time. See the table in Appendix B for demographic information about each participant.

Only two staff members, educational assistants or teacher's aides, filled out the survey, but unfortunately neither wanted to be interviewed for this study. Similarly, a survey was sent out to the parents and guardians of North Mesa seeking participants to provide a community perspective on curriculum and instruction. There were only three responses with no one expressing interest in being interviewed. The lack of response of both groups can be attributed to the amount of stress and all that is being asked of staff and family members due to shifts in instruction brought on by the pandemic. I made multiple attempts and recruiting members as did administration, but throughout the past two school years, parents and guardians were asked to complete weekly surveys by the school and state to gauge productivity and adherence to mitigation methods brought on by the pandemic, therefore it can be understood that the sheer number of surveys and questionnaires asked of the community hindered response rates for this study.

The final aspect of data needed for the study was that of the administration. The principal of North Mesa Elementary, who granted me access and approval of the study was one of the tribal members I conferred with in years prior. From the outset of planning to the start of collection, Ms. Irene changed roles from a culture and language teacher to that of school principal. Due to time constraints put on by rapid changes between in person and remote learning throughout the school

year, a Zoom interview was not able to be conducted. The questions that would have been asked were put into a Google Document and filled in at Ms. Irene's convenience. This method allowed for collaboration and follow up that was convenient and sensitive to her schedule. Throughout the data collection process, Ms. Irene refused compensation for her time citing our long-standing working relationship that started my first year as a classroom teacher at North Mesa. The interview protocols can be found in Appendix C.

The analysis of the data collected described in the next section was conducted throughout the collection process. As I listened to the teachers and asked questions of their choices and experiences, I found themes emerging which would inform the coding for this study. This process allowed for a more robust understanding of the data by looking for meaning within their responses as we came to it together, rather than a static document that was created and set aside for later. The nature of this information, and the context from which it emerges allows for such a view on perspectives and instructional choice by honoring the whole person style of instruction found in the context of the community.

#### **4.6 Analysis**

As mentioned above, analysis occurred throughout the collection process so as to identify themes that emerged so that they could be incorporated into questions for later interviews. As the participants were responding to questions and elaborating on their points, I was jotting down notes on broad scope ideas that were being discussed such as expectations of school and state, literature used in instruction, student performance, and the role the community has to play in curricular

decisions. These points were later affirmed once I received the transcriptions and relistened to segments of the audio files.

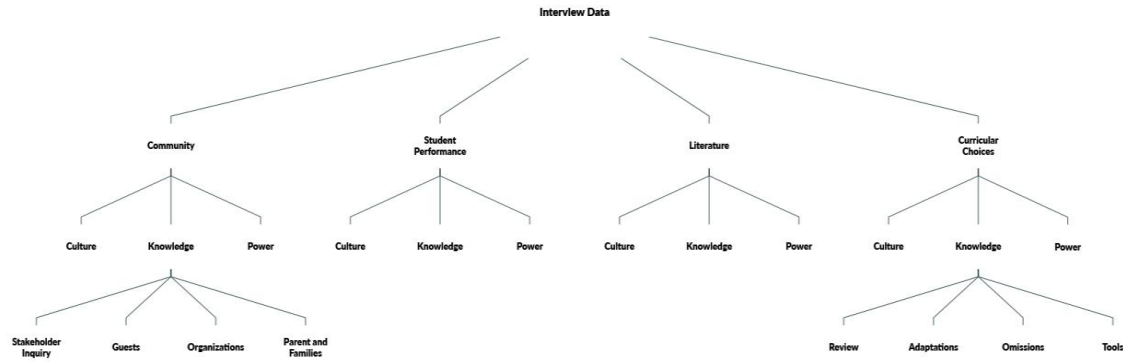
These themes were then used as guide points that would guide the first round of descriptive coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) which allowed for ease in extraction of larger themes throughout the data. These descriptive codes were labeled Curricular Choices, Student Success, Literature, and Community. The codebook found in Appendix D provides greater detail into the explanation for each code including the theme, any subthemes that are nested therein, and an example from the data. Each theme and subtheme was then coded using Brayboy's (2005) fifth tenet of TribalCrit. This coding method has been used throughout the milestone process to ensure that culture, knowledge, and power, and always foregrounded in the work.

In the case of this study, those points are used in the understanding of local tribal knowledges. Throughout the course of the interviews, the teachers mentioned that they received guidance and materials from the culture and language teachers and would seek advice when attempting to implement other texts and materials. Probing questions sought to better understand what these guidelines were so as to better formulate the value coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) which occurred in the second round. These values can be understood to be influenced by the culture, knowledge, and power of the Tribal Nation where North Mesa Elementary is located. The table in Appendix D provides a thorough explanation of these codes.

The first round of coding, descriptive, was done by hand using paper copies of transcripts from the teacher interviews. Once the first round was complete, electronic versions of the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo software for subsequent rounds of coding. The use of the software allowed for ease of grouping and re-coding necessary to find sub themes. Figure 1 below



shows themes and subthemes across multiple interview documents. A larger version of this image appears in Appendix E.



**Figure 6 Coding Map**

The nature of the interview process was modeled on Irving Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series. Each interview was conducted on Zoom and recorded. Participants were informed of the recording process and assented before the process began. At the conclusion of each session, the audio files were sent to a transcription company and were converted into Microsoft Word documents. These documents were coded by hand and through NVivo, a coding software program. Participant responses to questions, musings, and direct statements were the unit that the data was coded by, called a turn. A turn was completed when a statement concluded before another thought began. The transcripts were read in their entirety before coding began to determine where turns would be delineated. This allowed for an understanding of the flow of the conversation before dissecting the information further.

The first round of descriptive occurred using the four themes described above. In total, there were 136 turns coded in this round that fell into one of these themes. Community accounted for 24% of all codes, Curricular Choices with 53% and Student Performance at 17% and Literature

with 6% of the total codes. Due to the nature of the study, looking at ELA curricula, the Curricular Choices code was expected. The participants in the study referring to student performance and community input also followed expectations of the study, but the conversations about literature, both from the community and commercially available, was an interesting, though not unexpected result of the data.

This data set was then coded using the fifth tenet of Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit applying culture, knowledge, or power to each turn. This theoretical application yielded interesting results with Knowledge presenting 84% of the codes, while Culture only accounted for 7% and Power 9%. These findings are elaborated further in a later chapter, but early interpretations of this data show that the teachers and administration of North Mesa employ a practice of respect of the community by relying so heavily on their contexts. The low occurrence of Culture can be drawn to what many participants described as a guarding of the culture by community members due to historical manipulation and appropriation of said contexts. The low application of Culture was an expected outcome as the interview questions focused on the curriculum and the decisions of the teachers with only occasional inquiry about the students and their performance. Though an important context to consider, and one that is considered, it was beyond the scope of this study.

As mentioned above, the connections to community knowledge and understanding was the most prevalent coding value, and so Knowledge was the most frequently assigned code to participant responses. This was a clear indication that the teachers were listening to and incorporating community stakeholder input in their instructional choices. The amount of information shared in these codes was so extensive, that a third round of coding occurred for Community – Knowledge and Curricular Choices – Knowledge. This round followed the model of pattern coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) inferring themes that came from the data.

This resulted in a more nuanced understanding of how teachers came to understand local tribal knowledges and how to apply them to pedagogy, as well as refining curriculum through various steps of the material choosing process.

The cross coding of Community and Knowledge informed how teachers make sense and understand the influence that tribal histories and stories play in the people and their lives in North Mesa. When pattern coding was enacted, four themes emerged: Asking of Tribal Elders (18%)<sup>7</sup>, inviting guests to speak directly to students (32%), being informed by local organizations and their outreach (23%), and relying on parents and families (27%) to inform pedagogy. When pattern coding was completed on a cross reference of Curricular Choices and Knowledge, four themes were present that demonstrated how they leveraged local knowledge to make the curriculum more appropriate for students regarding representations. Those themes were review of materials (31%)<sup>8</sup>, omitting certain elements (32%), adapting materials (32%), and using tools to accomplish learning goals (9%). These themes are explained in greater detail in the Findings chapter later in this document.

In the following chapters, I will elaborate upon the findings of these themes and subthemes and provide insight as to how what these teachers are doing at North Mesa Elementary can be used in other classrooms in the school and for other Indigenous serving instructional spaces, but also in classrooms across the country. The steps taken to ensure culturally relevant and appropriate instruction can be beneficial to all students by showing that all peoples have a place in instruction and deserve to have their stories told.

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<sup>7</sup> These percentages are for the coding of Community and Knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> These totals represent the cross coding of Curricular Choice and Knowledge only.

## 5.0 Findings

What brings people to education is varied and unique to every individual who pursues a career as an educator. Some folks like Melissa decided to join the ‘family business’ after being raised by teachers. For some like Roberta and Cathy, being a teacher is a highly respected career choice. While teachers like Stella feel like they have always been a teacher, so it was only natural that they took formal steps towards the profession. While the participants in the study all came to North Mesa on different paths, they all shared similar motivations; to help in any way they could. As they discussed their careers and their instructional choices there was passion in their voices as they discussed making learning fun and relevant for students. But what happens when the classroom materials and systems prevent the teachers from doing the best possible job they can for the students? How do they make learning and instruction effective and appropriate for students when they cannot see themselves in the materials, or their families in positions of power and respect? The teachers and administrators at North Mesa must engage in pedagogy, planning, and practice that goes beyond what most teacher training programs offer to answer these questions. Through the process of qualitative interviews, the findings uncovered allow not only for community perspectives to enter the classroom, but for the teachers’ stories to be told in their own words.

The first interview conducted with each participant was intended to get to know the educator on a personal level. Basic demographic questions were asked including how long they had been teaching, how many years were in the district, and their teacher training programs. The range of experience in the district ranged from just a few months to over 40 years. The difference in time spent in North Mesa’s elementary school allowed for a diverse interpretation of curriculum,

instruction, assessment, and community relations. The amount of knowledge of local perspectives also helped to shape the teachers' framings of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies and curricular choices.

The participants in the study provided a wide range of insight due to their experience as educators in the district and their own cultural and educational background. Roberta has taught third grade in North Mesa for a few years after receiving her training in her home country of the Philippines where topics of culturally relevant instruction are frequently discussed in teacher education programs. Cathy also came from the Philippines and was in her first year at North Mesa. She discussed having multiple years' experience teaching in Native American contexts in another part of the state and had been trying to get a job at North Mesa for many years and was happy to finally be in the community.

Melissa was from a town 30 miles to the east of North Mesa and was tangentially familiar with the school and had heard about the struggles the students were having with tests and state-based measures. She came to the school with almost 30 years of teaching experience and had knowledge in culturally relevant practices but only from the perspective of the district where she used to teach and mentioned that these topics only have come to educational spaces since the founding of the Black Lives Matter movement. Stella came to participate in this study with the most experience having spent the entirety of her almost 40-year teaching career in North Mesa. In her time in the community, she taught in multiple content areas across the district's three schools. She mentioned that most of her time has been as a fifth-grade classroom teacher where she is currently a teacher. She incorporates multiple Native and Indigenous perspectives and cites her own identity as part Native American as motivation for this approach.

Finally, the principal of the school, Ms. Irene as the teachers identified her as, brought the local community perspectives to a position of power as a tribal member born and raised in the community. Irene spent six years as a culture and language teacher in the elementary school before becoming the principal three years ago. Her administrative training programs did not cover culturally relevant perspectives but did speak to training programs and professional developments as providing these contexts for her and her colleagues. At length, she mentioned using community-based resources that she and family gathered over many years to help the teachers and staff at North Mesa develop a stronger curriculum for all students. The perspectives and insights of all participants were discovered during a qualitative interview process.

One set of interview questions in that initial meeting, was aimed at understanding why the participants came to education as a career choice. Teachers and educators are under constant scrutiny and critique from outside perspectives, and recently there have been reports citing teachers leaving the classroom in droves (Zamarro et al., 2022). In New Mexico where North Mesa is located, the National Guard was deployed in January 2022 to serve as substitute teachers due to a shortage of coverage in some schools (Fordham, 2022). With constant coverage on social media and news outlets about teacher shortages and the difficulties of some districts finding educators, I was curious as to why these individuals got into this work, and why they remained. Their responses varied from, “I’ve always been teaching”, to “In my home country, teaching is a revered and respected profession”, while some cited it being a “family business”. When pressed further, all of the participants stated some version of the idea that they became a teacher to help others.

This care and compassion for others was a theme that carried throughout the next two sessions of questioning. Though the discussions were focused on curricular choices and community relations, the responses were always rooted in doing what was best for the students

and the community, by ensuring that whatever decisions they were making, they were done so in the best interest of the children. Some educators had more success with this than others due to years in the classroom, or availability of materials, however, the participant's empathy shone through when discussing how they understood and implemented local contexts.

This empathy was shown in the second and third interviews which looked deeper into the instructional choices made by the teachers and the relationships they have been with local community members. Informed by my previous research, explained in an earlier chapter, the second round of interview questions focused on how the teachers viewed the required ELA curriculum regarding representation and effectiveness for their students. Teachers were also asked how they supplemented the materials if necessary and with what texts or information they used to accomplish this task. During the third interview session, the teachers expanded upon community relationships and how they implement stakeholder knowledge in their practice. During this time, they were also able to reflect again on their own practice following previous questions about culturally relevant pedagogy and how they viewed their instruction after our time together. Their responses provide a clearer picture on instruction at North Mesa in ways that are not measured by assessments and state-based report cards.

In the pages that follow, I will elaborate on how the teachers and school design and negotiate a culturally responsive English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum and describe specific steps taken and the collaborations that occur with the staff of the school and the community at large. The participant responses have been coded and will be presented through a TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) lens focusing on the culture, knowledge, and power of the community. The desire to help and guide others as expressed by all participants is brought to light in the framing of this

community-based theory and has allowed for a deeper understanding of what is occurring during instruction at North Mesa Elementary.

## **5.1 A Culturally Responsive ELA Curriculum**

The participants in this study served in various roles in the school building. Some were general education classroom teachers ranging from first to fifth grade, while another is the reading intervention specialist for the lower grades, pre-K-2, as well as the principal of the school. During our conversations, it was revealed that there are a variety of curricular materials used in the school depending upon the grade level, and the responsibilities of the classroom. This was uncovered during the second round of coding using Brayboy's (2005) fifth tenet of TribalCrit. This is presented on the second level of coding as expressed in Figure 1 in the previous chapter, and in Appendix E. This process allowed for a more nuanced understanding of instruction through a range of materials, while also permitting comparison across the classrooms. One common theme across the participants' responses was that the curriculum that was being used was not cutting it, and the teachers must find ways of making it more relevant and appropriate for their students.

### **5.1.1 The Harvest Festival as an Instructional Theme**

The teachers in the study found that the tribe's harvest festival that occurs in September was the easiest opportunity to incorporate the local cultural knowledge into instruction. This theme emerged across multiple codes, but particularly Curricular Choices and Power during the third round, and Community and Power during the second. As it is a three-day event in which everyone



in the community participates at a lake outside of town, it is something that all students are aware of, and generally become excited for in the weeks leading to the event. In their ELA instruction, Melissa, a veteran first grade teacher from a town 30 miles to the east, decided to make felt flags of the two clans, where the students could make the flag of the clan their family was a part of. She mentioned that because of how young her students are, not all the students were aware of which group their family identified with, it allowed for conversation and research about their family history, in oral language activities.

Around this time, Roberta, originally from the Philippines, also used the excitement of the festival to engage their third-grade students in learning, by relating to the upcoming events. She discussed using the language app developed by the tribe in a vocabulary activity to provide the words in both English and the tribal language. The students relate the pictures to their own experience talking about how to make traditional dress, which the students began discussing their own experience in garb worn in each clan. Roberta took the opportunity to ask students how they went about the process and related it back to the concepts of the ELA instruction.

In fifth grade, Stella, who has been in the North Mesa community for over 40 years, drew on her own background and identity and related to that of their students. She mentioned bringing in clothing and items from her family, as well as that of other communities she spent time with, and was able to relate it to the lives of her students. This proved to be very successful and a tool that she has used throughout her career. She reflected, “The more you share yourself and pull from their background, then the more open the students become, the more verbal they become, the more willing they are to participate and learn and take a chance”. These three examples of conducting culturally relevant instruction show the impact of relating the students’ culture to instruction by actively engaging a specific lived experiences in the curriculum. The stories they have heard from

their families and elders, have become a part of their in-school learning. This is measured by the students' taking ownership of their learning, which Brayboy refers to as Power in TribalCrit.

### **5.1.2 Taking Ownership**

Once connections are made for the students between their experiences and instruction, some of the teachers found that students would automatically respond to texts and examples while others required a little more prompting. These examples were parsed out in the second round of coding applying the code of Power to the those designated as Student Knowledge during the first round. In her first-grade class, Melissa shared that while conducting a read aloud of a story with a Native American character, students responded to braids depicted in the illustrations by saying, "Oh, that looks like me". She also mentioned that this example blurred a gender binary, because both male and female students identified with the character because in the community, long and braided hair is common among all identities, and not attributed to male or female. Though the story read in this example was not a story from the local community, the students were able to make those connections and were successful in the intended learning outcomes by recognizing themselves in the materials.

Even at a young age, the students were able to make those connections across learning activities without much prompting. While speaking about the curriculum that the school was using, Melissa mentioned that in the rare instances a Native American or Indigenous person was shown in the text, the students would compare it to their own lives by saying, "We do that" or "We don't do that" and in one instance, "The story doesn't say that", referencing their own local story. Student age and development does not appear to be a factor in making connections with curriculum, they just need the opportunity to do so in a safe and respectful way.

Roberta's third grade students also had the opportunity to make connections with their curricular materials but needed a little bit more prompting. In a story that showed characters drumming, not an Indigenous story, the teacher asked the students if they had any experience with drums or ceremony similar to what was shown in the story. At that point many students began to share stories of their pow-wow experiences and began dancing. After showing Roberta how to do some of the steps, many of the students invited her to join them at the Harvest Festival. An invitation that she was flattered to receive, but not sure if she should have gone because she was not a tribal member.

These examples show how powerful connections can be when curriculum is culturally relevant to the students, and they make sense of the information themselves. In these previous examples, the intent of learning activity wasn't necessarily to make those connections apparent but arose naturally through the learning activity. In the examples that follow that were uncovered during Knowledge coding of the Student Performance theme, students took ownership of their knowledge as a deliberate act by their teachers.

Around the time of the last presidential election for the United States, Roberta decided to relate it to tribal elections which the students would have more knowledge about and be more directly impacted by. She instructed the students to talk with parents, and grandparents how they used to select a leader for the tribe, as well as how they do it now. This act of positioning the past with the contemporary showed that both contexts are important for student understanding and allowed the students to build their own knowledge. As it was a homework assignment during a school year when all instruction was virtual, she mentioned she had varying success with this activity but was able to publish some results in her classroom newsletter that gets distributed to families.

In a face-to-face classroom this year, Stella used her knowledge of art and its impact on the local community to connect student learning with past experiences. In talking about petroglyphs and how many are found in the geographic region where the reservation is located, her fifth-grade students created art and designs to “leave behind” for future generations to find. This involved having the students create cartoon representations of important life events on paper that was intended to represent hides. Stella also took this opportunity to discuss the traditional act of hide tanning and allowed the students to discuss their experience with the practice. Connecting the past with the present and on to the future, the students took ownership of what was important to them and discussed it in different time periods and allowed them to think ahead to what these knowledges might mean in the future.

Due to the nature of her work, Cathy found that direct connections and exposure to contexts was important for language learning, not only English, but the tribal language as well. Speaking directly to a lesson about animals, she discussed at length how she shows a student a picture with the both the English and tribal word for the creature. She mentioned that students, especially those of a younger age, are very familiar with the animals in the area and can make those connections easier and speak about their knowledge and exposure to them. She stressed the importance of presenting both contexts in a developmentally appropriate way.

However, the creation of these connecting activities isn't always so straightforward and easy to implement in instruction. Many of the participants questioned whether they had the right to do so as outsiders, while others were concerned about meeting the standards and benchmarks required of them. Speaking to the developmental and age levels of the students they work with; I again return to Cathy and how she was concerned about making connections because the difficulty it may pose for them. She spoke to creating vocabulary lists utilizing the language app as well as

guidance from Irene the principal but found that there weren't always one-to-one correspondences with the words in English and the tribal language, so negotiations had to occur on whether they should be used. Cathy mentioned that she spent considerable amount of time on this task and wasn't sure if it was a successful endeavor.

Cathy also wondered during our conversation about how much language was spoken at home, and how responsive families may be to these types of activities. She mentioned that research is needed to be done with the families and the community members at large to determine language usage. She believed this would guide her instruction by understanding how much of the tribal language to incorporate into her lessons.

Similarly, Roberta came to question if all her students, and their families not only spoke the tribal language at home, but if they were receptive to the stories and contexts being used in instructional spaces. While almost all of the students at North Mesa Elementary identify as Native American, not every household recognizes traditional ways of knowing and understanding. She mentioned that she has concerns that some parents will not like the activities that include the local stories and connections because they are, "against the culture". Pressed as to what she meant by that, Roberta mentioned that most parents don't care as long as the teacher is doing their work well, but some may be against the teaching of their culture in the classroom. This is an expected position for some families to take as historically schools were used as places of assimilation, discussed at length in previous chapters. I do not believe that the instances Roberta is talking about can be framed through an assimilationist lens, but it is something to note, which should be explored further in continuing research.

Using local connections and adapting stories into instruction is a process that has shown various levels of success at North Mesa Elementary, though the students may not always recognize

their inclusion. When asked if students had commented on these instructional moves, Stella mentioned that her fifth graders didn't comment on anything, saw it as another learning activity and participated as expected. The normalization of local contexts in ELA instruction is a long-term goal of this and any subsequent study, but it is a rarity occurring in only a few classrooms. Thus far, how teachers interact with students and make discussions have been presented. In what follows, I will discuss how the community at large influences the creation of a culturally responsive curriculum.

### **5.1.3 Community Connections and Partnerships**

Throughout the initial round of descriptive coding which partially occurred during the interviews themselves, it was evident that the role the community at large played in the development and implementation of a culturally relevant pedagogy would be significant. Stella specifically mentioned that the connections with the community were more important at North Mesa Elementary than at other schools in the state because the students will live, work, and be members of the community well after leaving the school. With her over four decades in the community she has seen the importance of the education the students will receive in the school.

However, not only veteran teachers saw the importance of community partnerships. Teachers who have only been at North Mesa for a year or two commented on how they have engaged with local stakeholders to shape and adapt their instruction to make it more relevant for their students. A third round of pattern coding occurred once Knowledge was applied to Community. This was exercised due to the volume of codes and the variety of response that emerged during the second round. The results were analyzed closely, and the following findings were inferred from participant statements. Conversations about these collaborations can be

categorized into four types of community interactions: Stakeholder Inquiries, Guests Speakers, Organizations, and Parents and Families. All of these different ways of working with the community have helped teachers adapt the stories of their students into the practice of instruction.

#### **5.1.3.1 Stakeholder Inquiries.**

For some of the teachers who have only been in the district for a short time, less than two school years, they found that asking directly what they could and couldn't teach, talk about, or engage in was the most direct way of understanding their role as educators. Roberta spoke about wanting to interact and share with the knowledge so that they could be more effective as an educator. They mentioned that they wanted to present information and contexts in a safe and deliberate, while also appropriate way. She has written plans and asked for tribal members to review them or provide input as how to approach it in a correct way.

She mentioned that this has been an enjoyable experience for her and finding out how the content of the curriculum relates to the community or doesn't, and how things can be resolved in a tribal way. This aligns with how culture is talked about and discussed in schools in her home country of the Philippines, which we discussed in our first interview. Roberta mentioned that culture and language is integrated into all aspects of instruction and isn't something separate like it is in so many schools in the United States. It can be understood that her desire to include local perspectives into her instruction is an extension of her teaching experience in her home context, therefore making it an enjoyable and familiar curricular choice for her current practice.

Similarly, Cathy, who is also from the Philippines, found that asking her colleagues directly for guidance was a successful way of bringing local stories into instructional spaces. Members of the school's teaching and support staff are also enrolled members of the local tribe. Cathy mentioned directly seeking their input about a holiday event that she was put in charge of in

December 2021. While the holiday program wasn't specifically curriculum related, she discussed the desire to connect some of the contemporary holiday traditions connect with local contexts, and therefore reach out to those with whom she has a working relationship and seek their input<sup>9</sup>. Overall, Cathy mentioned that she felt confident in the relationships she built and that she was on the surface of those collaborations at the time of the interview.

### **5.1.3.2 Guest Speakers.**

Another valuable tool for the teachers to use was having guest speakers come to the classroom to visit the students and provide different topics of discussion concerning local knowledges past and present, as well as potential careers for the students as they finished formal schooling. This was spearheaded primarily by Stella, who with her years of experience, has established relationships with many members of the community. Working closely with the tribe's cultural center, she spoke of several individuals who would share stories with the students. Some of the traditional topics were centered on storytelling and histories of flora and fauna, geographic locations, as well as morality tales and some stories just for fun. As is tradition, some stories can only be told at certain times of the year, such as coyote tales in the winter. These visitors were regular contributors to student learning, and they would come back at different times throughout the year.

The primary focus of this study is on instruction and pedagogy in ELA spaces, but Stella offered examples of how multiple content areas were covered through these sessions with the visitors. One guest would come in and discuss the weather and natural environment and how it has

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<sup>9</sup> The interviews occurred in November 2021 therefore, I do not have information on how this event played out.



changed in recent years, awhile another brought hides and would discuss the animals on the reservation and traditional ways of hunting and the uses of the animals.

Another example was the invitation for grandparents to spend the day in the school and discuss what school was like for them when they were students. This would allow for compare and contrast practice to occur through writing activities and the creating of gifts for the grandparents and all of the guest speakers. Stella mentioned that giving a gift to someone sharing their knowledge was a local tradition, so she built it into the instruction of her classes so that they would be able to find commonalities between school activities and traditional ways of showing gratitude.

The roles families play in constructing knowledge and instruction is heightened by the invitation for all families to come to the classroom and discuss anything they feel is important from stories to things about the jobs they hold on the reservation or locally. As stated earlier in this chapter, Stella recognizes that the education the students receive is more valuable in the school than in other communities because the students will typically live and work on the reservation upon graduation from the high school or a GED program. Having family members come into the school to discuss what they do and the skills they need to accomplish their tasks allows students to see the connection between curriculum and instruction with skills needed for employment. Instruction is then emphasized to include these skills, with an emphasis on ELA, particularly reading, writing, and oral language.

It should be noted that the examples shared by Stella primarily occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time that this study is being written, visitors and non-parents are not permitted in the school building at North Mesa Elementary. Therefore, adaptations to how students receive knowledge from community members is ongoing. Melissa spoke about a Zoom call that occurred with her class and the members of the tribal government. It was primarily a one-way

conversation where the president and the council talked to the students about doing their best and their expectations for academic and behavior performances. She noted that she was appreciative that they did this for the students, because it showed that those in power locally cared about what the students were doing in school.

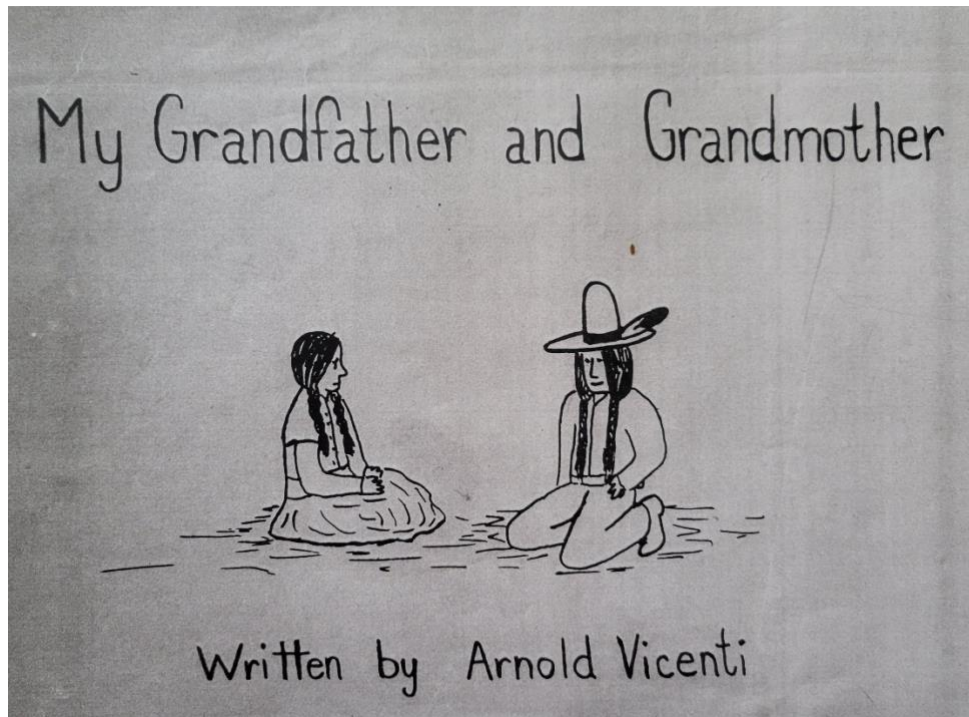
Just like schools and educators have to make adjustments and negotiations with curricular materials to ensure they are appropriate for local contexts, adaptations are continuing to occur because of the ongoing pandemic. All of the teachers interviewed mentioned that what they did in the classroom, or what they would like to do, is influenced by COVID. There was a sense of longing for other ways of instructing students but were constrained by mitigation measures put on by the state and tribal governments. However, there was hope that once instruction returned to ways that it had occurred before the outbreak of the virus, more could be done for the students, despite concern that they are behind because of lack of consistent instruction.

### **5.1.3.3 Organizations.**

The teachers and principal all mentioned throughout the course of the interviews how local organization were an important aspect of developing curriculum that was relevant and responsive to the needs of the students and to the contexts of the community. Both Roberta and Cathy mentioned working with the cultural center in different capacities. Roberta on looking for guidance on lessons and activities about locally made jewelry, and Cathy seeking assistance with the work she did with student council. She mentioned reaching out to the center for ideas and projects that the student council could participate in that would benefit the community. She discussed at length the collaboration that this type of relationship would require. One of these projects included the making of jewelry, separate from Roberta's lesson, and the possibility of holding a showcase in 2022 of what the students would create.

North Mesa's principal Irene spoke more about different organizations and how they have contributed to instruction and the school environment as a whole. Irene is an enrolled member of the tribe and worked as a culture and language teacher for six years prior to becoming the principal of the school. She discussed the tribe's department of education, not affiliated with the school district but with whom there is a partnership, providing materials, literature, and songs to include in instruction. She emphasized that only certain aspects of the culture can be instructed and performed by all teachers and tribal members are the only ones permitted to share specific contexts of culture.

What can be widely shared with everyone was a collaboration with the Junior Library League which created and maintained texts and picture books created by tribal members that were stored in the school's library. These stories were available to be checked out and used for entertainment or instructional purposes. They provided characters from the community of North Mesa in situations that were familiar to the students in fun and engaging ways. These texts were created and approved by tribal elders; therefore, any teacher could use the materials in ELA instruction. These texts were created in the late 1970s and at this time, there is no information on whether they will be updated with more current stories and tales.



**Figure 7 Example of a text from the Junior Library League Project**

#### **5.1.3.4 Parents and Families.**

The role that families play in the construction and implementation of curriculum is one that divided the participants in the study. Some of the teachers mentioned that their families are engaged with learning and help to construct knowledge, while some mentioned that there is tension with the parents of their students, and they felt they were, “walking on eggshells” when developing lessons and curriculum. While all of the previously mentioned ways of connecting with the community all spoke about strong community relations, this was the only topic that seemed to have different opinions on how these connections are enacted.

Cathy mentioned that she has constant communication with the families of her students and believes that the parents feel like they are important and listened to. She notes that the families

have various ways of doing things at home, and aspects of the culture they share with the student and wants to let them know those things are valued in her instruction. Melissa also spoke to how she includes parental perspectives in the construction of instruction and pedagogy by asking what books and stories are being shared at home, so that they can be related to during instructional time. Irene also spoke to the contributions that she and her family made throughout the years to classroom spaces with their traditions and stories.

Despite asking for input and for the families to share with her, Melissa also made mention about concerns that parent might not always trust her and question the decisions she is making. She worried that if she wanted to use something that could be considered traditional during instruction, the parents would question, “How would you know? Who gave you that?”. Melissa acknowledged that her identity as a Hispanic woman was different from that of her students and their families, so there was going to be tension. Throughout the course of the three interviews, when discussing cultural relevancy and appropriate representations in curricular choices, she mentioned a desire to know more, but felt that information was kept from her. This desire to seek more knowledge about the students and community is a difficult negotiation as most of the teachers in the school are cultural outsiders, and one that has various levels of success. Though through Stella’s examples, it can be theorized that the longer an individual teaches in the North Mesa community, the easier these negotiations become.

Through an understanding of students taking ownership of their learning, power, and the collaborations between community entities, knowledge, I have sought to answer the first research question of this study exploring how an Indigenous serving school designs and negotiations culturally responsive ELA curriculum. This is done through accurate and appropriate representations in instruction and materials, and the sharing of knowledge between the school and

community stakeholders. In the following sections, I continue this framing of TribalCrit by discussing specific steps through curricular choices made by educators and how the goals of the school and the community align with what is happening in ELA instruction.

## **5.2 The Steps Taken**

Through the information shared by the participants, described above, there is sufficient data to show that local contexts are imperative to the creation and enactment of culturally responsive pedagogies and instruction. The previous sections discuss how the teachers and administrators build a curriculum that is appropriate and effective for their students. In the sections that follow, I will explain how this is enacted.

North Mesa, as discussed previously is a publicly funded school on a reservation, therefore, is held to standards of instruction and assessment that other public schools are required to adhere to. This contrasts with schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) which are entirely federally funded and therefore follow different accountability measures. However, those collaborations and inclusion of local perspectives is not recognized by governing bodies the same way that other methods of instruction are valued. Therefore, to understand how the teacher and administrators of North Mesa enact and reinforce these perspectives instruction, we must look at the specific steps that are taken.

It should be noted that discussions of children's literature and their use in the classroom occurred during the interview process but will be presented in a later chapter focusing specifically on that topic. In the pages that follow, I will share what curricular choices are made through the knowledge of the community, as well as the culture and power as it relates to the specific

perspectives utilized for ELA instruction. Finally, I will share the expectations of the principal and how the goals of the administration and the school align with that of the classroom teachers.

### **5.2.1 Community Impact**

The role that the community plays in instruction at North Mesa has been explained in great detail already, however, it is important to speak about the impact of local perspectives on curricular choices. Utilizing the aspects of culture and power from Brayboy's (2005) fifth tenet of TribalCrit how stakeholders in the community value the instructional choices made by the teachers can be better understood. Roberta reminisced about a district wide training that occurred with the staff and the cultural center which helped to frame her understanding of the role education played in the community in the past. The presenters at this event spoke to the importance of the tribal language and how to respect and acknowledge perspectives in instruction. At this time, she was also informed that there were certain things she could and could not teach because of the protected aspects of the culture.

Roberta also mentioned at length that the language of the community was difficult for her to pick up on coming from the Philippines but recognized its importance similar to the value placed on other languages are valued in her own home community. Melissa also acknowledged the emphasis that the community puts on the language referencing the Zoom meeting she had with tribal leaders, described above. In both examples, neither the tribe nor any other stakeholder specifically mentioned what they expected instruction to look like or how it should proceed, but there is an understanding that there are expectations from these entities and the teachers recognize that.

In talking about the importance of the parents, community, and tribal nation expecting certain aspects of instruction, Cathy mentioned that it is all very important because parents and the community need to see themselves as part of the learning process of the children. She mentions that the more that local perspectives are deliberate instructional actions, “the harmony and the unity gets stronger. There is no divide, there is no void, and whenever there are issues, it can easily be solved because you are able to get that foundation.” In the following section, I will discuss what those actions are that make the instruction of ELA and other content areas culturally relevant for the students, and the community at large.

## **5.2.2 Approaches to Enacting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Throughout the interview process, specific questions were asked of the teachers as to what specific steps they were taking to enact culturally responsive pedagogies and instruction. This chapter has covered the importance of this approach to learning and this next section will discuss what those specific steps are. Upon a coding of the responses and a rereading of the codes, it was determined that the teachers employ one of four steps to ensure their instruction is relevant to the learning of their students that were determined by the third round of pattern coding of the cross referencing of Curricular Choices and Knowledges. Those steps are Review, Omissions, Adaptations, and Tools. In the pages that follow, I will explain how each one is employed with examples from the interview transcripts.

### **5.2.2.1 Review.**

The teachers interviewed in this study all discussed deep review of the content contained in the ELA curriculum before engaging in any instructional activity. In doing so, they ensured that



what they were providing for students was not only accurate, but relevant to the instructional and cultural goals of the school. Roberta mentioned going through the stories and finding what was relevant and what could be omitted, discussed later. She discussed finding connections to other stories that would be more appropriate, but still meet the instructional goals of the lesson.

She continued that this wasn't something she did just for the stories that were to be read, but for all curricular materials. Conferring with the culture and language teachers as well as with the principal, Roberta ensured that she was doing her due diligence and reviewing all aspects of her instruction. This allowed for appropriate representations and relevant contexts to the lives of the students and the community. When it was determined that something needed to be omitted or changed, whatever she chose to replace it with was also reviewed through the same outlets so that the endeavor was worthwhile. She lamented that this was a lot of work and at times confusing, but a necessary step that she needed to take.

Stella took the review process in a different direction. Having taught in the community for as long as she has, she was well aware of what was appropriate or not. The review that she engaged in was focused more on how the content related to the real-life skills the student would need to be successful in the community, elaborated upon in a previous section. This is also in the process of developing instruction and pedagogy, that she would rely on community perspectives, specifically those working in jobs on the reservation, to determine what would be valuable in instruction. As roles and expectations change over time with tribal governance, Stella found this to be a more fluid task, one she would have to adapt from year to year.

As a newer teacher to the district, less than a year, Cathy found herself engaging in a Review of materials quite frequently, a task she "jumped right in". Her admitted enthusiasm not only allowed for her own excitement over content to come through, but also a reflective practice

on how she has approached instruction previously. Questioning if she might be barging into cultural barriers, Cathy would seek input and advice from culture and language teachers about how to understand curricular contexts in an understanding centered in the local tribal community.

This review occurred not only before planning and enacting instruction, but also after the lesson occurred, as well as asking for feedback and input from Irene to assure that she had presented everything in an appropriate manner. There was great concern in her voice as she dreaded misrepresenting the community and emphasized that she would rely heavily on materials and stories from the village [town] to make sure she was making connections with the community through storytelling. She mentioned not having a lot of stories herself, but in fact was creating one of her own by attempting to understand and problematize the process.

Melissa also relied on the culture and language teachers when reviewing the phonics materials that came with the curriculum. As there are expectations that community culture be tied into instruction as much as possible, she was having difficulty understanding how long a sound could be taught in such a way. Reviewing and examining course materials and reflecting on her own understanding of the tribal language, limited at best as she reported herself, required her to seek out new understanding and uses of cultural relevancy for the students while meeting the objectives of the lesson. Also, a relatively new teacher to the community, less than a year, Melissa expressed frustration in not having access to all aspects of the culture to implement into her instruction. She did mention however that she used every bit she was allowed and has tried her best up to this point but wasn't sure how successful she has been.

#### **5.2.2.2 Omissions.**

Upon review of the course materials that the curriculum provides, the teachers found that there were many stories, problems, and examples that would align with the students' home culture

and were included in instruction. However, often times there were pictures and stories that went against the mores of the community. This resulted in omitting some aspects of the curriculum to avoid conflict with local knowledges and understandings.

The most frequently occurring of these omissions were centered on depictions of snakes and owls, two animals that carry a lot of spiritual power in the community. Roberta, Cathy, and Melissa all mentioned about skipping stories, worksheets and examples that showed these animals. This was particularly difficult for teachers of younger students where snakes are used to represent the letter s in many examples. In these instances, omission alone cannot occur as there needs to be something to take its place, wherein a more culturally appropriate word that start with the letter s could be utilized.

Other omissions that were discussed included important life events. Coming of age ceremonies are highly respected and important events for the youth of the community. What occurs during these times of tradition and prayer is closely guarded by members of the community, therefore their discussion in instruction was kept of official practice. For example, as expressed by Cathy, she went to find information on how to relate to such an event and was told it was best to leave it be as it was information for tribal members only. She then found a different story and context to present for a lesson.

The final omission discussed had nothing to do with anything cultural or linguistic about the community but with the geographic location of the community and the school. North Mesa is located in a very rural part of northern New Mexico, some 30 miles from the next town. Melissa found a set of stories and examples that discussed subways and riding them to work and school. Since there are no subways in the state of New Mexico, she decided to omit this story as attempting to explain that mode of public transportation would take up most of the instructional time. Not all

omissions that occurred were for depictions that were culturally taboo, but they all served a purpose that recognized and respected the contexts that the students were coming to school with.

### **5.2.2.3 Adaptations.**

Not all reviews of the curricular materials resulted in removing something from intended instruction. Often a simple adaptation of materials would make a piece of ELA curriculum more aligned with the goals and expectations of the school and the community at large. Roberta explained simply that when she would develop lesson plans, she would then look to see how Native Americans, or the local tribal group, would be represented in the materials. With the help of a mentor, she was able to become proficient at adapting standard lesson plans to be more culturally relevant.

A specific example of this was after Irene conducted a classroom observation of Roberta's lesson which involved discussing aspects of culture. Feedback offered by principal suggested that even stand-alone conversations about the culture somehow be tied into a content area, which in this instance English [ELA] was suggested. This showed that the culture of the community is expected to be integrated to all aspects of instruction, and not relegated to a separate curricular act. This reinforces what the literature says regarding integrating concepts of community perspectives into everyday instruction. This, however, is a rare instance of it occurring in an ELA context.

Continuing the examples of adaptations occurring in these spaces, Stella planned on replacing all content and curricular material with Native American and Indigenous perspectives for an entire month of instruction. She experimented with this around the time of the harvest festival described earlier but received approval from administration to do this for the entire unit. There is greater explanation of the texts and stories that she planned on using in the following chapter on children's literature. Stella made sure to emphasize that all of the standards and

benchmarks would be met, but the way that it is delivered will use culturally relevant texts, even if they aren't all centered in the local community contexts.

The reliance on community knowledge was evident in Cathy's adaptations that included family perspectives and input. She spoke about a project that she started where all the materials and assignments were put together in a packet and sent home so that parents and students could collaborate on the work, rather than students making sense of the content on their own. The discoveries that were made on how children are taught in the home allowed her to make other adaptations and changes to how content and instruction is delivered.

This also lent itself for adaptations in how she communicated with families in a more informal way through newsletter and emails sent to parents. By understanding where the students were coming from in regard to exposure to language, texts, and other activities, the instruction that occurred in her classroom was more comfortable for the students and allowed for them to be more receptive to the information as it was familiar for them. Cathy also discussed how these adaptations encouraged for her to integrate her own Filipino culture and values which was well received by the parents.

Finally, Melissa explained how an understanding of a culturally relevant pedagogy caused her to reflect on how she has experienced language usage and adapted her approach to instruction. She mentioned that as identifying as Hispanic, she would get offended if someone tried to superficially speak her language to her just to check a box, or to say that they did it. She realized that language instruction and usage had to be deliberate and meaningful, and therefore reflection on her part as to how she would be presenting and speaking the local language in instructional spaces. Recognition of culturally relevant practices not only benefit the students, but as shown here, they can benefit teachers as well.

#### 5.2.2.4 Tools.

As mentioned previously, the curriculum<sup>10</sup> that is used at the school does not adequately meet the needs of the students and community by not providing accurate and meaningful representations and contexts from which the students can build their understanding of state required educational contexts. Teachers and educators through collaborations with culture and language teachers as well as community stakeholders must find or create resources to make the instruction more relevant to the goals of the school and community. When discussing what specific steps were taken, a number of tools that the educators employ were discussed.

The first and most commonly mentioned tool was an app that many teachers had on their phone that was a language learning program developed for the local tribal language. This not only improved teacher understanding of the language and usage, but it also allowed for them to make quick connections that could be made in instructional activities. Roberta mentioned that during the art activity, described above, she was able to connect her phone to a speaker and play the words that identified the animals that students were painting. The children were able to engage in an arts-based activity, receive oral language practice, as well as cultural relevancy all through the use of this one app.

Cathy also spoke about utilizing this app as a way of connecting content to context but found that not every word as a one to one correspondence in the tribal language so additional resources may be needed. Irene pointed out that in the school's library there is a collection of books and texts created by local community members that could be used to supplement understandings

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<sup>10</sup> It was noted by several teachers and the principal that this is the last year of the adoption cycle for the curriculum and a new program will be adopted in the 2022-23 academic year.

and the needs for instruction. A greater explanation of the stories and texts that are used to supplement curricular materials is discussed in a later chapter.

A third and final tool that is available to teachers is video and audio recordings of stories and songs recorded by tribal elders that are also housed in the school's library. These were collected in collaboration with the tribe's department of education and are available for teachers to use to supplement their instruction and include in the classroom when the content would benefit from their use. This information was shared by Irene, and it is unknown if any of the teacher know about or use these tools that are available to them.

Whether it is by omitting, adding, or supplementing, the teachers and administrators have taken steps to ensure that their instruction is relevant and appropriate for the students. In multiple instances throughout the interview, the teachers mentioned the expectations of Irene and the school district. In the section that follows, I will discuss what those expectations are, how they are recognized, and a brief summary of how they are addressed.

### **5.2.3 Administrative Expectations of Implementation**

During the second interview for each participant, I would ask the question about implementation and the expectations of administration. The goal of this line of questioning was to better understand the assumptions of the school for using the curriculum, despite it not being considered culturally relevant and appropriate. The results would frame a discussion about the expectations of the state in the use of curricular materials for instruction. Due to the specific nature of these questions, they were coded at Curricular Choices, but not cross coded in the second round due to their administrative nature, and not carrying the weight of local knowledges. The results of the study have shown that there is use of a commercially available scripted curriculum, Wonders

published by McGraw-Hill for the general education classrooms and Orton-Gillingham in the reading intervention classroom, but there are many omissions, adaptations, and negotiations needed to make it a viable tool for ELA instruction. Understanding the expectations of the school's administration would make clear it's repeated use despite its shortcomings.

Each participant had a different response to this line of questioning. Roberta mentioned that the expectations of Irene were that the curriculum contain more culturally relevant materials and she would offer suggestions on how that could happen. Stella discussed that teachers are expected to make it work and figure out implementation on their own because Irene never taught ELA or any related content area. Cathy made mention of prioritizing statewide trainings on the curriculum and methodologies, while Melissa explained that implementation of the curriculum was expected to be done with fidelity. This was an unexpected result of this study. The four teachers all responded in different ways with various understandings of what they were expected to do. When Irene was sked about this, her response provided another data point that didn't align with the other responses.

During her line of questioning, Irene stated that she believes that expectations for implementation are higher than what's occurring in the classrooms. She pointed to the high turnover rate that the school has for teachers, so training new staff on cultures and curriculum becoming an overwhelming endeavor mentioning it's difficult, "to keep teachers 100% up to expectations". In response to this shortcoming, Irene mentioned restructuring planning meetings to include student data for each student and looking into adapting instruction for struggling or advanced students. It is interesting to note that she did not talk about the curricular materials specifically but mentioned student achievement as a marker for implementation and fidelity.



When pressed about the establishment of standards of implementation following her response, Stella passionately declared that she did not want anything handed from administration concerning the expectations of implementation and fidelity. She expanded that her concern was rooted in the fear that administration would want to control how content is taught. Administrative turnover is higher than with teachers, as seen with the hiring of three different superintendents since this study began, therefore, changing expectations every time a new administrator would come in would be too disruptive for teacher practice.

Perhaps a middle ground could be met wherein the administration of the school could establish what their expectations would be for implementation but allowing teachers and grade levels to determine what that would look like could be a possibility. It would still give teachers autonomy when choosing how to teach content, but timelines and percentages of materials could be dictated and adapted when necessary. This is an implication beyond the scope of this study, but one that should be considered when considering how to approach differing opinions on teaching and practice at a classroom level.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Throughout the interview process, the teachers and administrator at North Mesa made known that commercially made curriculum and systems of reporting to state and federal agencies prevented the teachers from having a culturally relevant and appropriate set of materials. Through community collaborations and bringing local stories into practice, they provide an opportunity for their students to see themselves in the materials and their families in positions of power and respect. The teachers and administrators at North Mesa engage in pedagogy, planning, and practice

that goes beyond what most teacher training programs offer to strengthen student learning and performance in ways not typically measured.

As mentioned previously, the role that children's literature played was a significant finding, and previous research conducted prompted its own section in the results. Many of the teachers mentioned using guidance from the culture and language teachers to develop texts that would be appropriate and meet the needs of the students. Stella mentioned that she was replacing an entire month's worth of curriculum with literature and stories from Native and Indigenous authors and illustrators. In previously cited studies, children's literature was shown to be one of the easiest ways to present information from communities outside of the culture of a classroom. The teachers at North Mesa have shown that this is an effective practice for many reasons including students' engagement in learning activities. In the chapter that follows, I provide a literature review centering on commercially available children's literature and its use for culturally relevant pedagogy and providing examples from the interviews of how this is used in real world applications.

## **6.0 The Trends and Use of Indigenous Children’s Literature in Instruction**

### **6.1 Introduction**

A theme that emerged and that was reinforced through the interviews in this study was the need to supplement curricular materials with culturally relevant texts and literature. To represent the lived experiences of student perspectives, the teachers adequately and appropriately sought out and implemented texts and perspectives from communities not often centered in curricular materials, particularly the one where the school is located. The teachers cited the need for the students to see themselves in the text as the reason behind this decision. Again, by returning to the read aloud example Melissa shared. She mentioned that when sharing a story whose illustrations had a child with their hair in braids, her students responded that the characters looked like them and were excited to participate. She mentioned taking her cues from the children and how they were responding which made the instructional activity more valuable to them. This step in their instruction was an added task on to their workload but was done so as a necessity to ensure that their students could relate to the materials. This is a trend that has been gaining attention and notoriety as more texts and resources have become available in recent years.

Previously, when stories and perspectives outside of a cultural mainstream were incorporated into instruction, they were done so as a comparison piece meant to view how others are different from the perspectives of white, English-speaking students (Larrick, 1991). The knowledge contained in these stories was commodified as part of the curriculum and meant for interpretation by groups not identified in the texts (Smith, 2012). So, while students from those communities could see themselves briefly in the instruction, it was positioned so in unfamiliar

ways. The perspectives of who is telling the story was taken away. As Gangi (2008) stresses, “children of color should see pictures of authors and illustrators who look the way they do on book jackets as white children can” (p. 32). Schools and teacher training programs upheld this separation for many years unfortunately by presenting only one perspective and only one culture, that as the mainstream white, middle-class culture in instructional and literary spaces

Gangi affirms this point by explaining that many classrooms’ sets of texts and literature provide stories and experiences that mirror White children and ignore those perspectives of children of color. This is reinforced though school systems continue to privilege these sets as “quality children’s and young adult literature” (p. 30). In an effort to show that classrooms use literature that is deemed valuable in the perspectives of the institutions, schools often promote only one perspective, therefore dismissing and denying those from other groups and communities (Smith, 2012). This can be a considered a globalization of knowledge, but only for Western cultures, therefore placing itself at the top of a hierarchy that rarely allows for change and variation in what types of stories are told (Gangi, 2008).

This has not been occurring in schools alone, but also in colleges and universities that educate and train future educators, by not preparing preservice teachers to understand and teach the perspectives of students other than those of a Western mainstream (Dénomme-Welch & Montero, 2014). Like the teachers in this study however, some preservice and in-service teachers seek out texts and stories that are centered in their students’ lives in an effort to reach their students (Gangi, 2008). Educators recognize the importance of these texts and seek them out of their own accord. Without an appreciation for these perspectives, schools and teacher education programs exclude Native and Indigenous perspectives from instructional spaces (Kovach, 2009). Schools are not politically neutral spaces and by these omissions, continue to perpetuate upholding Western

ideals (Dénomme-Welch & Montero, 2014). Foregrounding the stories, and the act of storytelling is one way that the teachers in this study, have worked to dismantle this structure. However, the teachers are often working without guidance or clarity, with few tools to rely on as they seek resources.

Seeking out authors, illustrators, and publishers that challenge these Western and Eurocentric views on literature has shown to strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (Peterson & Robinson, 2020). By allowing for stories from Indigenous to be told, a shift in power occurs in instructional spaces (D. H. Justice, 2018). When these stories are told, they are a reminder to those centered, and those viewing from the outside, that they belong in positions of power and respect (Kovach, 2009). As more educators and schools bring these stories into the classroom, Indigenous authors and illustrators find new ways to tell these stories and make these perspectives known to a wider audience (Peterson & Robinson, 2020), which oftentimes means moving beyond just the textual, a Western concept (Kovach, 2009), into a more spiritual and natural way of understanding and learning (Peterson & Robinson, 2020).

Traditionally, and anthropologically, these perspectives were considered to be primarily focused in oral traditions, which in turned viewed by institutions of power as less than valuable than other forms of literacy and learning (Kovach, 2009). When this occurs, it sends a message that these knowledges do not belong in these spaces, despite that, “story is methodologically congruent with tribal knowledges” (p. 35). Kovach goes on to express that so much of Indigenous knowing is internalized, and it is difficult for outsiders to see and value these understandings of the world. However, in recent years, more texts have become available, and brought to mainstream attention that center these knowledges not only for those in the communities intended for representation, but for those outside these communities as well.

When students are given access to reading and writing materials that they are reflected in, they come to instructional spaces better prepared for ways of learning and thinking because these perspectives are nurtured (Neuman & Celano, 2001). In their study of black children's neighborhoods and the texts available in them, Neuman and Celano (2001) found a disparity that not only were those communities lacking texts, but the texts that were available did not reflect the children's lives. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) discusses at length that when students see themselves in texts, but barely recognize the content, there are compounded problems as well by creating a superficial representation. There is greater opportunity now than in previous years for teachers to include adequate and appropriate representations in text that move towards righting the wrongs described so far.

In a study of early childhood curriculum, Guy Jones and Sally Moomaw (2002) critically evaluated what was being taught in schools through their experiences as educators and Jones' identity as Hunkpapa Lakota and came to find two reasons why Native American representations must be presented correctly in education. The first is blatant bias and disregard for Indigenous peoples in school contexts as the need to learn about these distinct peoples and their culture which leads to an understanding of true diversity. The second point is discussed later. These concerns are not new, despite only recently coming to the consciousness of white educators. Debbie Reese (2019) explains that for a long time, Natives and People of Color have been speaking out about representations in text. Most commercially available books however, continue trends of misrepresentation of silencing.

In a government report on antibias curriculum and instruction, Deidre Almeida (1996) explains that there are two ways that Indigenous perspectives have been discussed in texts. The first is the 'dead and buried approach', meaning that everything has happened in the past, and the

‘tourist approach’, cultures should be viewed from the outside without a deep understanding of perspectives. This leads to continued inaccurate curricular representation by non-Native peoples and a perpetuation of myths and inaccuracies of peoples living today (Jones & Moomaw, 2002). It is because of these reasons, it is vital that teachers seek out texts and materials that are not only appropriate, but of the highest quality available

In this chapter, I look at what current trends exist in children’s literature (ages 3-8) that is centered on and for Native American and Indigenous children that can and has been used in instructional spaces. First, I describe a search conducted through Library Literature Information Sciences (LLIS) to understand the texts and stories available commercially. This is followed by a discussion on suggested ways educators can recognize and implement these texts into instruction through a literature review conducted through the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Finally, implications and suggestions are provided that explain how these texts can be used for a larger audience to bring these perspectives to other cultural groups in an honest and respectful way. Throughout this chapter, I will be referencing examples provided by the teachers in this study to align what was found in the literature, with what teachers are currently doing in the classroom.

## **6.2 Methods**

At the outset of this line of inquiry, I first conducted a database search to determine where the appropriate literature would be drawn from to answer the research question. This review would require two contexts to be addressed to be considered successful. One would be necessary for classroom practice and another for understanding the trends in literature currently available.

Utilizing the University of Pittsburgh's resources, it was determined that two online databases would be used for the literature search: ERIC for classroom practice, and Library Literature Information Science for the current trends.

For ERIC, I used the following search terms, 'Native American or American Indian or Indigenous or Native Tribes or Native People' and 'Children's literature or children's books or picture books or Children's Picture Books'. I narrowed the search to full text only, published January 2011 – 2021. These parameters were chosen to include literature published in the last decade, when more Native and Indigenous voices have been foregrounded through various outlets, explained later in this chapter. This returned 43 results. Articles were excluded through use of titles and keywords and were any that were not set in North American contexts, or did not focus on Native American, Indigenous, or First Nations peoples.

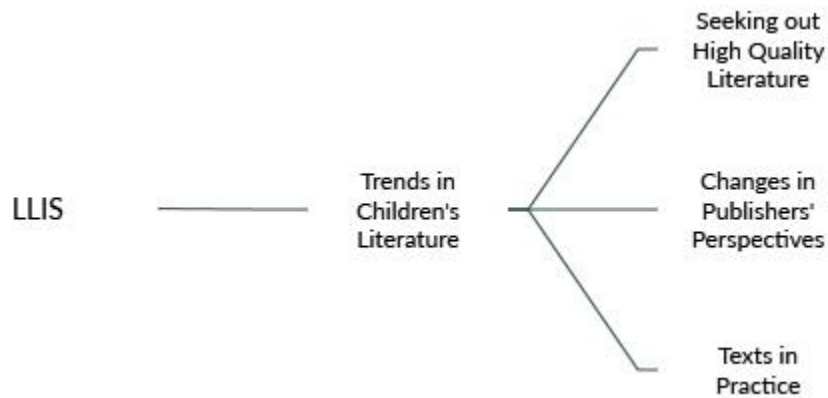
This resulted in a deep abstract read of 11 articles. Six were kept for a more thorough evaluation, four were set aside as possibilities, and one was eliminated, with the initial six remaining as the core literature for this chapter. The four that were kept as maybes were very specific contexts and not applicable to wide range of learning or knowledge, so they were saved in case specific examples were needed, but not utilized and saved for the possibility of future research.

For the LLIS database, the search terms, publication years, and full text requirements were kept the same. This resulted in 79 articles being returned. A read through of titles and abstracts occurred and at this time book reviews were excluded. Though insightful, they did not provide necessary information and data for this study. After an evaluation on whether periodicals should be included, it was decided that they would remain in this review as they were relevant to the study to establish trends in publishing. Excluded were all texts not centered in North America.

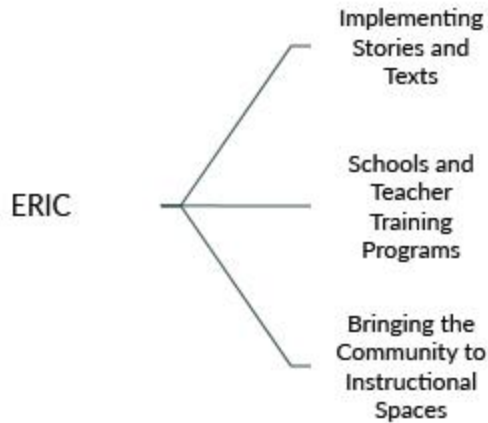


Six of those articles were kept for further evaluation. One was a duplicate from the ERIC search, and three were kept as possibilities. Three others were eliminated due to contexts outside of North American geopolitical perspectives. I then engaged in a deeper reading for all remaining articles across both databases. This led to two core findings: What trends are present in publishing, and how teachers can best use these texts in instruction or classroom activities centered on NA/IFN knowledge. The table in Appendix F shows the sources found in the database source.

Across these readings, seven ancestral sources were discovered, and research into these four pieces of literature determined that they were of value to the study and strengthened the findings of the review and are presented in Appendix F. Readings from the LLIS search were categorized into the following categories: Seeking Out High Quality Literature, Changes in Publishers' Perspectives, and Texts in Practice. Literature from ERIC were classified into: Implementing Stories and Texts Schools and Teacher Training Programs and Bringing the Community to Instructional Spaces. The maps presented below express the sorting of knowledge uncovered. Larger versions of these maps can be found in Appendix G.

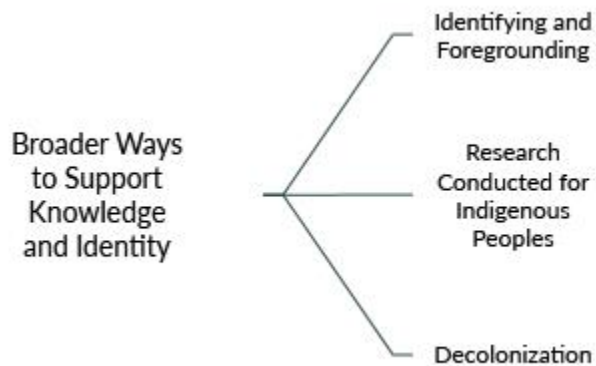


**Figure 8 Coding Map for LLIS Search**



**Figure 9 Coding Map for ERIC Search**

An unexpected finding from these readings from both databases and ancestral readings was a collection of ideas on broader ideas to support knowledge and identity through the implementation of culturally relevant children’s literature. These themes emerged when the authors of the various studies discussed topics and ideas that went beyond classroom spaces and into larger societal needs of the communities. These findings were sorted using descriptive coding into Identifying and Foregrounding, Research Conducted for Indigenous Peoples, and Decolonization. A map of this sorting appears below with a larger version in Appendix G.



**Figure 10 Broader Ways to Support Knowledge Coding Map**

In the following section I will discuss findings on the trends in current children's literature and provide examples from participant interviews about what resources are being utilized in classroom practice.

### **6.3 Trends in Texts**

As mentioned throughout this study, and expressed by the participants during the interviews, there is a lack of representation and high-quality literature available in curricular materials. Teachers are expected to make their instruction culturally relevant regardless, which means supplementing with materials that they must find, evaluate, and implement on their own. In this section, I will briefly discuss what types of texts are available, some of the Indigenous publishers currently making sure that there are texts available, and what the teachers in North Mesa are currently implementing to ensure their students can see themselves in instruction.

These texts not only benefit school children, but families at large can benefit from these texts being available. In an area of Mexico with high Mayan populations, Laura Justice et al. (2020) created a bilingual book program, Mayan and Spanish, where 16 texts were distributed to families in an effort to increase local literacies. Results from this study showed that not only children benefited from these texts but that family members of all ages were able to gain something from seeing their culture and language represented in books. The use of these texts should not be limited to any age or development group either. Melissa, a first-grade teacher at North Mesa Elementary, noted that when presenting Native American literature in her class, the students compare their own contexts with what they see in the books even at their young age. She reported students saying, "That's not how we do this" and "Our nation doesn't believe in that". No matter the age, children

recognize their own experiences in literature and there are texts that will allow for this to occur easily and naturally.

### **6.3.1 Seeking Out High Quality Literature**

For many years, early childhood education has had four major concerns when it came to represent Native American and Indigenous perspectives during instruction according to Guy Jones and Sally Moomaw (2002). These issues are the omission of Native American materials from the curriculum, inaccurate portrayals, stereotyping, and cultural insensitivity. However, in recent years, more materials have become available, and voices of individual bringing these perspectives to the forefront have been heard. Debbie Reese (2019) has described this as worlds colliding, as Native and Indigenous peoples are using social media and other forms of communication to share of their knowledge with a wider audience. Reese herself maintains a blog titled American Indians in Children's Literature (Reese, 2022) that consistently provides space for texts that provide quality representations and speaks out against materials that are inaccurate or harmful.

The American Indian Library Association (2022) works towards breaking down perceptions and elevating conversations about Native issues according to their website. This organization catalogues and awards pieces of literature and texts that meet the goals of elevation and furthering conversations. They provide resources on how to view these texts, discuss them in educational and public settings, and where they can be obtained. Often items these resources are created by and for Native and Indigenous peoples, which has been lacking in commercially available spaces for many years.

Awards that are bestowed on books are also an excellent resource for finding and implementing quality texts, especially as many of the core awards to the children's literature field

have recently taken a focus on issues of representation and diversity. Recently, picture books have received recognition in mass market spaces. In 2020, *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* (Maillard & Martinez-Neal, 2019) won the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal and the American Indian Youth Literature Award, while in 2021 *We Are Water Protectors* (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020) won the Caldecott Medal marking the first time a Native American Illustrator received that distinction. These books only recently became available due to Native and Indigenous centered publishers becoming more prevalent in commercially available spaces, though many have been around for decades, and primarily in what is now Canada.

### **6.3.2 Changes in Publishers' Perspectives**

During the research process, many publishers were discussed in the literature as foregrounding Native and Indigenous authors and illustrators, with most of these institutions being owned and operated by groups who hold those identities. This is a shift from how books have previously been created by and made available by outsiders to the culture and the language. This section will briefly introduce some of the publishers that were frequently discussed in the literature. Teachers and administrators should seek out the titles published by these institutions.

The most recent imprint to come from Harper Collins is Heartdrum. It is for Native American authors for children ages eight and up. It has only been publishing since 2021 but has already made an impact in the United States. Conversely, the oldest publishing house in Canada is Theytus Books, which is a Salish word meaning, 'preserving or the sake of handing down'. Regardless of years active, both publishers are attempted to pass along the knowledge to future generations. Both Heartdrum and Theytus work towards amplifying all Native, Indigenous and First Nations groups, while others are more localized and specific to regions and peoples.

Pemmican Publications is centered in Metis stories promoting their authors and illustrators and has been publishing these works since 1980. Inhabit Media is Inuit owned and an independent publisher in the Canadian Arctic. According to their own biography, they were born out of a need for Nunavut children to see their culture accurately represented in the books read in schools. Many times, these publishing houses were created from recognizing the needs of school aged children and came about because what was available was not enough. Not all publishers who center on Native and Indigenous contexts are owned and operated by those who hold those identities. Annick Press is committed to literature for youth that reflects the world of the contemporary child but has published texts that meet the needs of First Nation, Metis, and Indigenous students in Canada. Publishers must ensure that they can find and support talents whose voices need to be brought to a wider audience (O'Reilly, 2015). It is important for selecting texts that teachers and educators do the work of understanding a publisher's motivations for creating a text.

### **6.3.3 Texts In Practice**

Throughout the interviews with the teachers and administration at North Mesa, the use of culturally relevant texts came up frequently as to how pedagogy was created and implemented. For some of the teachers it was a difficult endeavor as they were new to the school and the community and were finding ways to navigate the community while for some like Stella, they had multiple resources at the ready and were able to swap in appropriate literature for almost any instructional unit. A common theme emerged throughout these discussions with the culture and language teachers being a resource to help provide not only the stories and the literature, but also the contexts with which they could be implemented.

Roberta and Cathy both spoke on multiple occasions about using coyote stories in their instruction. These interviews occurred in November 2021 after the first snowfall so culturally, they were allowed to be told. These types of tales are only for winter months and told at specific times of the year. Roberta mentioned that the curriculum during this unit had Ojibwe stories and she sought out advice from the culture and language teacher for more localized contexts to apply. The story that she ended up sharing was similar enough to the Ojibwe tale that she could meet the standards and benchmarks of the curriculum while centering it in a local context. Hoping to make her reading intervention instruction meet the themes of Native American History month, Cathy also used coyote stories, but only when it was the correct time of year to do so, but also with guidance of Irene and the culture and language teacher. She also discussed utilizing YouTube and other resources to find more materials to make the instruction locally centered.

The proper selection and implementation of texts in the classrooms at North Mesa is a continued effort that occurs throughout the year. Cathy explained that during weekly staff meetings, Irene would share stories and variations of tales to better accustom the staff to the community. It was noted that these stories held important and significant places in the community, therefore the staff picked up on these points and implement them into reading [ELA] instruction. Cathy did note that within the variations of the stories being told, there were resources available from other tribal groups, therefore they could find print texts, such as the coyote tales described above, as the local stories were of an oral tradition, and not often written or published.

These stories exist primarily as oral tales but should not be considered any less a piece of literature as something that is printed and bound in a book. For many centuries, the local tribals language existed only in this way. It was only in the 1960s that their words were put into writing which would then become known as a written language. The stories that have become literature

for this community are interpreted and translated to meet the needs of the classroom and the students so some deviation in the tale can exist from one grade level to another. The culture and language teachers are seen as the arbiters of this knowledge and a number of the participants acknowledged their role in the implementation of the stories. Melissa mentions that all she has to do is walk across the hall to the culture and language room and inquire about how to approach storytelling and instructional usage. She also mentioned the guidance she receives when purchasing texts to implement in the classroom to ensure they align and meet the goal of the story being told.

Because of her experience in the community, Stella has amassed a large collection of Native American stories and texts that implements into her practice, particularly during the month she is replacing curricular materials, described in the preceding chapter. At the time of the interview, she was using a collection of Cherokee rabbit stories that she had pieced together from a number of sources and would consistently read poems from *Thirteen Moons on a Turtle's Back* (Bruchac et al., 1997) across multiple content areas. She mentioned that it was important for students to not only see their own tribe in the curriculum, but to learn about and compare to the other 546<sup>11</sup> tribes registered in the United States. The role that literature plays in Stella's classroom is not just as a tool for ELA instruction, but one from which students better understand their own cultural background through seeing their own place, as well as how others may have similar or different understandings of the world. Literature is both a mirror and a window (Sims Bishop, 1990).

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<sup>11</sup> The number of federally recognized tribes is 574 with 200 more groups that do not have that distinction (O'Neill, 2021).



As discussed previously, many teachers mentioned that finding appropriate stories and texts that not only meet the learning goals of a lesson but that are also culturally relevant as being a difficult task, it should be noted that there was also consensus that it was a meaningful endeavor. In the previous sections of this chapter, many current trends were described and it was revealed that many communities have recently seen an increase in not only the number of representations available in commercially available texts, but the quality of those representations has also increased compared to years prior (Reese, 2022). The teachers of North Mesa Elementary have made mention of utilizing these texts and others that are written and illustrated by individuals who identify as members of the group they are representing in texts.

Unfortunately, the local tribal nation of the North Mesa community, has yet to see their community reflected in these texts, due in part to the isolated nature of the community itself, and its small enrollment (~1,500 members on average). So rather than forego any representation at all, the participants in the study made mention of finding the stories from the community to implement on their own. Roberta spoke at length about important it was because students love listening to and interacting with the materials. She found that holding conversations with parents and elders reinforced how important this was for her as a learning process in selecting texts and stories. Not only is the selection of texts important for accurate and appropriate representations, but how they are implemented is also a key feature of including any perspective. The next section explores what teachers can do to implement these stories and their benefit to learning and compassion for all students.

## **6.4 How Teachers Can Use These Texts**

In previous research, and long held opinions about what constitutes high-quality literature, opinions of Indigenous texts were that they weren't "'literary' enough" (Justice, 2018, p. 147). Justice goes on to explain that by othering Indigenous literatures, colonial powers are able to determine what is, and what isn't high quality literature simply by attributing it to an identity group. The work in this chapter, and the texts utilized by the teachers in the study have shown that this outdated notion should be forgotten and replaced with the understanding that these texts are literary enough and serve multiple functions not only for Native American and Indigenous communities, but also to the benefit of all peoples. In this next section, I describe how teachers can implement these stories and texts, how school systems and teacher training programs can include them in the curricula, and ways to bring the community into instructional spaces. This is not intended to be a comprehensive understanding how to implement these stories, but steps to consider that have been gleaned from the interviews conducted as well as the literature selected for this review.

### **6.4.1 Implementing Stories and Texts**

The simplest and most effective way to bring these contexts into the classroom, is by including more texts written, illustrated, and published by Indigenous creators. Daniel Heath Justice (2018) points out that that literature generally means written alphabetic texts, but it also should include oral histories and traditions. It is meaningful not only for those creating that work, but it shows the fluidity of texts and what makes an item or event literary. These also can include digital and web-based resources that would benefit the educators by broadening their perspectives

as to what counts as literary and how it can be implemented in instruction (Meyer, 2011). In doing so, teachers from any background can present these perspectives and do so in an appropriate and respectful way.

Shelley Stagg Peterson and Red Bear Robinson (2020) affirm that being an outsider does not prevent a teacher from using these texts, particularly when using picture books, but they do have a responsibility to understand the contexts from which the literature comes, to ensure that this idea of appropriateness and respectfulness is maintained. They suggest seeking out those creators, authors, illustrators, and publishers, as well as scholars, to ensure due diligence. In doing so, Peterson and Robinson state that teachers can awaken a cultural consciousness for all peoples, leading to respectful relationships. Understanding the source of the texts creates positive Indigenous identities and possible healing of previous policy and instructional choice.

It is also important to have these texts available for student use and a general inclusion of classroom resources. Teachers are needed to provide instruction and context, but Neuman and Celano (2001) also speak to the role that student exploration plays in literacy based materials. Exposure to these texts in both formal and informal ways will further those relationships described above but normalizing the perspectives of students in these communities but those outside that group as well. Educators can provide the context behind the stories and texts, but students should be able to explore on their own and make meaning they find valuable. In classrooms where there are a variety of perspectives shown in materials, a wider range of understandings of communities is able to occur.

To conclude this section, it should be restated that one type of literary method, or one type of literacy event, should not be privileged over another. Returning to Daniel Heath Justice's (2018) work on why Indigenous literatures matter, we are reminded that when one is privileged over

another, a type of violence occurs that privileges the written over the oral, the perspectives of one group over another, and the silencing of voices that are trying to be heard. Justice strongly emphasizes that of one of the reasons that sharing stories is done orally is because, “so much knowledge is transmitted between living people, not mediated by objects like books” (p. 25). Therefore, these other forms of literature and literacy must be given space in instruction. Teachers and educators cannot do this alone. The follow section discusses how schools and teacher preparatory programs can enact these changes and implement these perspectives.

#### **6.4.2 Schools and Teacher Training Programs**

Teachers are in the best position to provide materials and contexts for students to interact with in both formal and informal learning experiences. However, there is a need for larger systems of education to step up and do more to bring adequate and appropriate resources and contexts into these spaces. In their study of resources available to black children in their communities, Neuman and Celano (2001) point out that children of color are more likely to rely on public institutions, such as schools and libraries, to provide opportunities to see themselves in texts. However, these places have fallen short and failed to offer diverse perspectives. This section explores how schools and teacher training programs can create institutions of respect and understanding for multiple perspectives.

When schools require texts and literature be taught, they are sending a message that certain stories and perspectives matter. When those examples all speak to and reflect one particular group, often times a Western, white middle-class ways of living and knowing, not only does it continue the foregrounding and privileging of dominant groups, but it also silences and withholds others

from these spaces. Greater effort must be made to include requirement curricula allow for various points of view and a greater representation of the children in the school.

In resources focusing specifically on early childhood classrooms, Guy Jones and Sally Moomaw (2002) explain that throughout the history of schooling in the United States, there has been blatant bias in curricular materials when discussing Native American issues in education. The speak to racist and stereotypical representations in texts and liken them to “Little Black Sambo” (p. 3), a degrading representation of African Americans. They move away from a deficit perspective to explain their motivation expressing that learning about other cultures leads to a better understanding and appreciation of true diversity. Their text provides strategies and resources for teachers as well as insight on how to avoid problematic materials.

In their text, Jones and Moomaw list outcomes for teachers that that are described as goals to strengthen a learning environment for all children. These outcomes are: “Learn to accurately evaluate Native American curriculum materials, Develop appropriate strategies for implementing Native curriculum, Develop a resource file of appropriate Native literature and curriculum materials, and Understand how to recognize and avoid stereotypes of American Indian Peoples” (p. 25). Each chapter focuses on a different educational theme most commonly found in core curricula such as community, art, and the environment. Within each theme there are lists of activities that early childhood educators can implement in their classroom. Pertinent to this study, there are multiple examples of literature that is widely available from commercial publishers.

Each of these lists provide a wide range of perspectives from various tribal nations and groups from across Canada and the United States. Jones identifies as Blackfoot and stresses the need for representations for all peoples to ensure that connections can be made for a deeper understanding and respect for another. These texts range from picture books to beginning readers

and cover topics that meet the theme of each chapter. Throughout the overall text, Jones and Moomaw tie in stories of their experiences as students and educators to help illuminate issues surrounding the use of Native and Indigenous topics in educational spaces. The greatest suggestion offered echoes what many resources have said throughout this dissertation recommend, and that is to reach out to the communities and lean from them to understand their perspectives to ensure an appropriate and accurate representation of the culture and the peoples.

Daniel Heath Justice (2018) reminds us that this is difficult and an often burdensome task due to the weight that Indigenous literatures and their history bring to instructional spaces, but it is a necessary one. He offers that these texts, written, oral, and other means of transmission, reflect truths of survival, and offer a reflection on the beauty of the world from which they originated. But while the atrocities and harm that come from the history of these communities are inextricably linked with the literatures, that is not their whole story. The perseverance of survival and the thriving of many peoples are transmitted with Indigenous literatures and literacy activities are given places of power in instruction. When schools present and lift these perspectives, students of all peoples benefit.

But it takes more than just their presence in the curriculum for them to be a benefit, as discussed in the previous section. Colleges and universities that train future educators must provide the skills and practice to problematize materials to determine if they are to be included, and how to question and remove representations that are harmful. In a study of preservice teachers, Dénomme-Welch and Montero (2014) found that many of the participants recalled studying something about First Nations, Metis, and Indigenous peoples in school, they retained very little information. For in-service teachers, many times these contexts are only offered as workshops or professional development training and omitted from the curriculum themselves. The authors found

it difficult for their participants to take on this new perspective as the schools they came from as younger students were set up in the colonized systems that have existed for generations.

A participant survey revealed that the preservice teachers had a desire to learn more of Indigenous contexts and how they apply to instruction but weren't sure how to go about receiving that information for the benefit of their own understanding. Fewer however, were interested in how the colonial structure of schooling caused many of these problems. Therefore, schools and universities must offer these contexts and perspectives to their students. This can be done by including literature by Indigenous authors, illustrators, and publishers, but it can go further by having members of these communities welcomed into the classrooms and provide first-hand knowledge, elaborated upon further in the following section.

The role that a teacher plays in exposing students to different perspectives and texts is invaluable, but they cannot do it alone. They must first have the resources available to them in a way that benefits the students as well as their practices as instructors, but also enter classroom spaces with the skills and abilities to properly question and problematize text for their appropriateness and use in instruction. Rudine Sims Bishop (1983) states that literature is one of the most valuable ways that children are socialized and through which cultural values are shared. When students are exposed to stereotypical and harmful depictions of themselves and others, it causes inextricable damage. Therefore, the implementation and use of literature that foregrounds Indigenous peoples in their contexts, their language, and their power is a vital task and skill that all teachers must be prepared for, regardless of their own background. To adequately implement these texts and perspectives, teachers must look to the communities for their knowledge and understanding.

### 6.4.3 Bringing the Community to Instructional Spaces

As mentioned previously, not identifying as a member of a community does not restrict an individual from participating in the use of the literature and contexts of that community, but extra caution must be taken so as not to coopt perspectives that have been historically marginalized. In fact, many scholars agree that the easiest way for someone to immerse themselves in a community is through the reading and processing of literature and story (Sims, 1983). But immersion in texts is not enough. Teachers and educators must seek out the communities from which the texts originated to ensure their appropriate use and implementation. In this section, I will briefly describe why teachers should reach out to communities and discuss how this can be done so appropriately.

While teachers provide instruction and contexts for many cultural and linguistic groups, they often times are not in the best position to speak for said community. This is due in large part to the cultural disconnect between educators and their students on multiple identity classifications such as race, class, gender, etc. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). Therefore, teachers should participate in what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) refers to as a community action approach. This step toward understanding assumes that people know and can reflect on their own lives and can provide the correct context and understanding. This is reaffirmed in Dénomme-Welch and Montero (2014), through the specific statement from the United Nations formally establishing that, Indigenous peoples are the holders of their language, knowledge, and beliefs. Many Indigenous communities have established resources that bridge their knowledge and communities with cultural outsiders as a way to present and uphold that information while rightfully guarding the personal and the spiritual. Through internet searches and contacting the



communities directly, teachers can work with the knowledge keepers in an instructionally appropriate way.

As mentioned throughout this study, this type of work is a large undertaking. When curricular materials do not contain the necessary contexts, teachers must seek them out on their own, which is an endeavor on an already put on professional. In addition, this work can be difficult as educators must come to terms with their own identity and the power they wield as an educator. However, it is work that must be conducted, and work that shouldn't be done alone. It should be the goal of reaching out and understanding community contexts to bring about deeper ways of, "analyzing and critiquing notions of de/colonizing through performative strategies" (p. 143). The goal of decolonization in instruction using texts and literature will be discussed later, but it is mentioned here as an act of respect in an expectation of healing and education, as a step toward community processes and inclusion (Smith, 2012).

The inclusion and understanding of community contexts is not only for the benefit of the teacher and the appropriateness of the texts included in instruction, but as an a method of bringing tribal epistemologies into the classroom (Kovach, 2009). By including these texts and community perspectives through the act of communication and inclusion, educators and schools can move toward a long-term goal of foregrounding Indigenous perspectives in learning. But it cannot be a way one exchange of knowledge with a community giving to the teacher without an acknowledgement or inclusion of perspective. When reaching out to, and communicating with community knowledge keepers, educators should strive towards making those individuals part of the process of learning and instruction. Allowing their knowledge to be part of the pedagogy that is occurring, and not just at an add on or a checklist item. The sharing of knowledge is a long-term

commitment and one what must occur if we are to truly create an equitable and inclusive learning space for all peoples.

Finally, Shelley Stagg Peterson and Red Bear Robinson (2020) acknowledge that Indigenous knowledge keepers can't always be present every time a teacher or school utilizes a text or story. Therefore, it is necessary, and appropriate, for educators to create "funds of knowledge" (p. 4) about lived experiences and perspectives to draw upon later. They recommend consulting with community members, websites created by Indigenous peoples, as well as referencing the literature that is available. Having sought out the input of these aforementioned knowledge keepers providers is the first step a teacher should take in understanding stories, literature, and contexts, but other resources are available and can be utilized to the benefit of all involved.

### **6.5 Broader Ways to Support Knowledge and Identity**

A large part of the research used for this chapter, and a teaching tool implemented by the teachers in the study, is the use these texts have on broader understandings of supporting Indigenous knowledge and identity. Just as young children react positively to literature and picture books, so too can adults who have held misinformation for many years and can work towards an understanding of accurate and appropriate representation of Indigenous peoples. This is true in the academy as well as everyday life.

Margaret Kovach (2009) stresses that without exposure to Indigenous inquiry, which we can take to mean approaching school and schooling, non-Indigenous academics many not know now to recognize lines of inquiry and approaches to methodologies. Kovach proceeds to discuss

that the work can be difficult but knowing the purpose of the research is vital to the act of giving back. Giving back to the community, giving back to institutions, or giving back to an individual, all are vital and must be relevant. There is no age or development limit for understanding the contexts and places Indigenous peoples come from and come to through story and literature.

This next section briefly describes how teachers and educators can use Indigenous literature to go beyond the classroom and instruction, to broaden the reach of these stories to reach a louder audience. In the following pages framing instructional moves made by the teachers and backed up by the literature, I will discuss how to identify and foreground perspectives, how research can be conducted, and finally, hold a brief discussion on the role that teachers play in the act of decolonization. As a theory, understanding, and practice, decolonization is an important and valuable act of defiance and of healing. My positionality as an educator and researcher have benefited from colonizing structures, however, it is important for me to recognize my privilege in this work and speak to the movement that I cannot truly be a part of. Therefore, this discussion of decolonization that appears below is one of description and relation to this study, and not one of a coopting strategy for my own gain.

### **6.5.1 Identifying and Foregrounding**

The importance of correctly identifying and foregrounding Indigenous perspectives must start at the point of ensuring that any example or representation used is correct through various forms of vetting, described throughout this study. To move beyond instructional spaces and into the everyday, it is important that both Native and non-Native peoples see examples of these communities in not just historical contexts, but also in contemporary settings where peoples live and work today (Kovach, 2009; Meyer, 2011). Kovach (2009) speaks to cultural grounding being

a vital part of the use of any part of research and centering it in the context of a person's life and relationship with culture, so therefore where that person is currently should be valued and considered. As described previously, most representations of Indigenous peoples are set in the past relegating these examples to history, further silencing the perspectives of peoples living today. Picture books like *Fry Bread*(Maillard & Martinez-Neal, 2019) and *We Are Water Protectors* (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020) are two recent examples of how contemporary examples are not only placing these perspectives in current events, but also receiving accolades for being of the highest quality.

Another step that needs to be taken is the recognition of the multiple ways Indigenous peoples identify themselves, and how often that lies in conflict with how institutions such as schools and libraries identify these peoples. Meyer (2011) points out that in libraries, there is not even consistency within those buildings as “Indians of North America” (p.24) is a category for most materials, and Native American is used for K-12 stories and texts. Again, identifying a group by their chosen name is the most effective and appropriate way of identifying, but recognition that there are multiple ways to identify a group is an important skill of ensure power to the individual communities is maintained. Again, allowing the author or illustrator to name their context and respecting and honoring that is the easiest way that educators can move towards a reciprocal and respected relationship. As Kovach (2009) states, “Writing is a process of defining, thus the power resides in the writer” (p. 132). Communities must be given the opportunity to tell their own stories and educators must honor those perspectives.

With the rise of social media over the last decade as a common form of communication, Native and Indigenous communities have been using these to not only draw attention to inappropriate representations, but also to lift individuals who are doing good, quality work. Debbie

Reese's (2022) blog *American Indians in Children's Literature* is the foremost resource of children's and YA literature, and through her social media accounts, one can be linked to other authors, illustrators, and publishers doing the work that has been missing for so many years because there was no place for them. Rather than finding a way to enter in white-dominated areas of literature and creation, they have made them for themselves and have had success in spreading the word on what is being done.

All popular forms of media are picking up on appropriate representations with comic books, TV shows and movies, and podcasts by allowing those peoples to speak for themselves and to share their stories. There are teachers and educators doing this work, but more is needed to be done by larger social institutions. At the time of the publication of this study the number of resources and exposure available to individuals is far greater than at the outset. It is my belief that as the non-Indigenous population picks up and embraces these creators, education will follow. The next step is bringing this recognition to the academy, whose grip has been loosening on what is considered good and quality research, but still has a lot of work to be done to be considered equitable.

### **6.5.2 Research Conducted for Indigenous Peoples**

The time of doing research on people must end, and we as researchers must focus on what can be done with peoples in their contexts for the benefit of the community. In this section, I will briefly describe how teachers can appropriately approach the idea of conducting research that involves Indigenous communities. In many Social Studies and History classes in the past, students would often choose a 'tribe' and conduct research about them and produce what often times would look like an arts and crafts activity (Jones & Moomaw, 2002). This instructional activity is rife

with problems including essentialized representations, inaccurate sources of data, and stereotypical performances. If teachers are interested in their students learning about a community of peoples, there are more effective and appropriate ways of going about this inquiry. Adaptations to this long-standing activity can still include studies of tribal groups and communities, but as an integrated part of a unit. Within a series of learning activities, texts and perspectives from Native and Indigenous communities can be used to reinforce a skill such as comprehension or sequence of events. This is an alternative to shining a light on a group and othering them by creating activities that remove them from educational constructs as peoples with history and perspectives and instead making them something to be studied.

Just as when selecting texts for use in instruction, research must be done with the community, and not on it; a reciprocal partnership where giving back is the ultimate goal of the process (Kovach, 2009). If an instructional activity is to occur, the educator should reach out to find resources created by those communities so as to ensure the stories being told are accurate and come from those peoples. This will also allow the educator to understand what is “useful” (p. 82) in relation to what is a key point of understanding of a context and what is secondary and not sensationalized as being a core feature of the culture. The teachers must then identify how this work will benefit the community to maintain this sense of community learning. It does not need to be a monetary transaction but could be an opportunity for the community to share the story in its own way, something not permitted in the past. It is up to the educator to determine, by communicating with the community, what this reciprocal relationship will look like. Cathy spoke to this when she mentioned that she did extensive research on what stories to use by finding texts and videos online to try and create a series of lessons that would be appropriate for her classroom. She elaborated that after making these decisions, she always confers with other teachers in the

school who are registered tribal members as well as the culture and language teachers. Reciprocity is shown by finding and promoting these perspectives and allowing the community to have the final say in its implementation. An important step in this process.

It is also important to recognize that these instructional activities should be multidisciplinary in approach. People do not exist in one content area, so attempts to learn about a community should be rooted in understandings of as much about them as possible and not narrow in on one or two features. For many Indigenous communities, science is as important and literacy as important as history because they are all interconnected (Chang, 2016). In doing so, teachers can also make connections between various aspects of their students' lives by showing that though taught in isolation, content and contexts are connected and rely on one another for a fuller learning and educational experience. There are many book lists and resources available that can help teachers and teacher educators find and implement stories and texts that appropriately cross content areas

### **6.5.3 Decolonization**

A study on Indigenous literatures and ways of knowing cannot be without a discussion of decolonization and how teachers can participate in this act of social justice. Kovach (2009) stresses that, "the purpose of decolonization is to create space in everyday life, research, academia, and society for an Indigenous perspective without it being neglected, shunted aside, mocked, or dismissed" (p. 85). For any piece of literature selected, activity planned, and perspective centered it must be done in a way that lifts Indigenous perspectives while recognizing the influence of colonization and working towards changing those systems.

However, this is not a simple and straight forward task that can be completed through reading materials and professional developments. Spy Dénomme-Welch and M. Kristiina Montero (2014) point out that many educators of Indigenous students were raised in colonizing communities and perspectives and must therefore be trained to recognize these positions and consider complexities of unpacking and deconstructing their previously held beliefs. They do point out that this can be done through the use of children's literature, but it must be completed in such a way that is beneficial and not intended to take over or dominate, but to allow the perspectives of the communities to be foregrounded and to speak to how the systems that have been in place are damaging and must be altered for instruction.

Continuing with this idea of literature as a tool for decolonization, Daniel Heath Justice (2018) reminds us that stories allow for a reminder that others exist beyond ourselves. That those others have, "desires, loves, fears, and feelings, and that our own behavior can either enrich their lives or diminish them" (p. 77). Meaning, how we react to and implement stories in classrooms can continue to uphold systems of power instilled by colonizing forces, or we can view others with compassion and attempt to place their perspectives at a place of honor and understanding. This empathy and understanding cannot exist apart from an individual's identity and educators must strive toward an incorporation of all aspects for meaningful instruction (Neuman & Celano, 2001).

Acts of empathy can exist as representation and the privileging perspectives of Indigenous authors, illustrators, and publishers. If these voices are not heard in instructional settings, it is tantamount to silencing and ignoring, thus further perpetuating colonial perspectives (Kovach, 2009). When teachers select and utilize those texts, they are creating a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place (Smith, 2012), which is guided by tribal epistemologies (Kovach, 2009). Kovach explains that knowledge that comes from these communities is not



acultural nor apolitical, and they should not be considered as such. Due to the nature of schooling and instruction historically in North American countries, the United States and Canada, the act of including Indigenous perspectives must be a political, as well as an empathetic, act bringing power to these stories. A new story must be made with perspectives that have always existed with those that are happening now, and those yet to come.

Creating this collective story can be an attempt to bring together fractured perspectives that colonization of instruction created (Smith, 2012). Through the creation of various content areas and instructional periods, Western schooling teaches contexts in isolation and as described throughout this chapter, Indigenous perspectives can be viewed as interlinked, relying on multiple contexts to reach the whole person. Roberta mentioned the need for more of these own texts across her instruction because, when talking about her students responding to texts, she stated, “students interact, and they love to listen to those stories”. No comments were made similar to this when referencing the stories of the boxed curriculum. In fact, Roberta commented on the difficulties she had with making the curriculum relevant, “It’s hard to connect for cultures right here, honestly for the student but that is why I’m using some websites and other research just to make it more relevant”. Centering Indigenous perspectives and Identities through the use of stories and literatures, is a step towards bringing all of those pieces back together. Kovach (2009) points out that these acts should not be just for schooling, but decolonization should be for creating spaces in everyday life but must begin in these areas.

In some educational spaces, classrooms and teacher training programs, this work has been referred to as ‘post-colonial’ which is a misnomer. The use of the indicator post- implies that we have moved beyond the colonial influences and histories of instructional spaces. It is not finished, but has shifted to accommodate contemporary perspectives (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). While

schools may not appear to be as assimilationist as they once were, by continuing instructional practices as they have always been, does nothing but to serve the colonial goals of education through subjugation and the elimination of community perspectives. Classroom teachers and those instructors in higher education, must recognize the goals of the instruction and how they can either perpetuate or move towards decolonizing instructional spaces. This is a complex topic and includes deeper evaluation and explanation here.

To close this section, I return to the discussion of using stories and literatures, written and oral, directly from communities in respectful and meaningful ways. Decolonization can start by the recognition and implementation of high-quality literature as an act of dismantling power structures that have been in place in classrooms and in library spaces. Picture books that show vibrant scenes of culture can be just as effective as personal narratives explaining an individual's journey through life if given the proper space and understanding. Justice (2018) stresses that stories allow us to recognize others beyond our selves and allows for an expression that is rarely articulated in school spaces. Decolonization requires much more than just inserting texts and allowing for representations to be seen, but for many teachers and teacher educators who come from outside of these communities it can be the first step in the right direction of achieving the goals of adequate and appropriate representation.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained how literature, specifically children's literature and storytelling, can be used a tool for ELA instruction which builds and enacts a culturally relevant pedagogy in an Indigenous service school. I also provided guidance how teachers, educators, and administrators

can seek out high-quality representations and texts and how they can be implemented into classroom instruction. Implications for the use of Indigenous children's literature are described in the final chapter of this study. While it may not always be an easy task, these texts and representations must be put into place not only for Indigenous communities, but for all children to begin breaking down perceptions and begin the process of decolonizing literature spaces.

Guy Jones and Sally Moomaw (2002) explain that children feel the most comfortable when there are other children from their culture around them. When this isn't possible for whatever reason, educators should make it a priority to display pictures and materials that mirror the children's culture and identity. These must be of the highest quality however, and as Debbie Reese points out (2019), they should be tribally specific wherever possible. But before teachers can do that, they must first understand and examine their own underlying beliefs and ideologies about Native Americans (Almeida, 1996). It is a lifelong process that must first begin with preservice teachers (Meyer, 2011) but continue to adapt as more voices and perspectives are given places of power in instruction. This study shows educators at various points in their teaching career coming to understand their role in this process and making constant negotiations for the benefit of their students.

## **7.0 Implications and Conclusion**

Across the various components of the dissertation study, multiple implications have arisen for the use of curricular materials, teacher education and training, and the use of children's literature in instructional spaces. Throughout the study, these three themes emerged in different ways, but all tied back to the role of community, and the need for mutual respect and reciprocity between school and stake holders. In this chapter, I provide implications for future research and teacher training as well as describing the limitations of this study before providing concluding thoughts directed specifically at the findings from the collaboration with North Mesa elementary.

### **7.1 Implications**

This section briefly describes topics that can be researched further for a broader understanding of the themes discussed throughout the study. It should be understood that these suggestions, and the result of the overall studied are centered in a very specific context. However, their application is possible across various communities, and not only those that claim an Indigenous identity. Teachers and educators of all students can benefit from the steps taken by those individuals that collaborated on this study.

### **7.1.1 The Use of Curricular Materials – Motivational Work**

The findings of the pilot study have implications for both research and for teacher education, specifically how to address issues of identity within curriculum, and other instructional materials. Speaking to this later point first, the results of the analysis have shown that there is a gap between instructional materials used in third grade classrooms across the United States. Analyzing widely adopted curricula allowed for an understanding that most students in the US would be instructed using similar materials due to the commercialized nature of curriculum publishing. These materials are intended to meet the needs of all students but falls short of providing adequate representation of diverse linguistic and cultural groups, not only Native Americans and Indigenous students. Classroom teachers and teacher educators should examine curricula more closely to determine whose story is being told, whose voice is being heard, and who are we leaving behind when we adopt these materials without questioning their impact on identity.

It should be noted that widespread change is necessary nationally beginning at state and federal levels of administration, but meaningful steps can be taken at an individual level with teachers already engaged in the instruction of students. Much can also be inferred about the role that teacher education at the post-secondary level plays on understandings of curriculum, and the impact it can have on future generations of professions. Conversations about how to question materials, and strategies to include more diverse representations in instructional spaces, can and should occur before teacher learners enter professional spaces. By problematizing the stories, assessments, and overall materials used in public school classrooms, and centering those perspectives in local communities, these future teachers will have a set of skills and understanding

that can work towards an attempt at representing all students, regardless of background, in valuable learning experiences.

### **7.1.2 Teacher Preparation – Findings**

As expressed by Dr. Ladson-Billings (2022), teacher education programs are culpable for the quality of instruction for students of color across the United States. In both positive, and negative, connotations of this sentiment. Individuals are not born teachers; they must have the desire to educate and be trained in in formative and empathetic spaces. This study, through the interviews conducted of the teachers at North Mesa Elementary, has shown that some programs do address topics of culture and race, but it sporadic, and does not center the voices of all peoples.

To properly prepare teachers to enter classrooms where there will be students who identify in different ways than the teachers, schools of education must make community outreach a part of the training process. In this study, numerous examples of collaboration between the educators interviewed and community stakeholders show that to increase cultural knowledge, the community must be a part of the process. It is imperative to also make known that not all knowledge is available and some aspects of a culture and private are sacred, Pre-, and in-service teachers must be shown how to negotiate the relationships towards building a more culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy and instructional practice.

Elaborated upon further in the next section, a final implication for teacher training programs based upon the findings of this study is the need of the practice of critically examining literature and curricular materials before their implementation in instructional settings. As stated in the study that motivated this work, when materials provide inaccurate and inappropriate representations in the texts their use perpetuates these issues and racist stereotypes. Teacher

training programs must build into their studies ways to critically examine texts providing opportunities for discussion about removal and replacement of instructional components that often do more harm than good. This involves understanding localized theory and applying it to real world examples. Without this component, dominant perspectives will be allowed to continue to control the narrative of instruction and schooling.

### **7.1.3 Children's Literature – Trends in Children's Literature**

The use of children's literature that is both engaging and appropriate for Indigenous communities is a recent trend due to increased availability in commercial markets. The teachers in this study described how they used literature developed in their community while also relying on stories and contexts from other tribal nations. When possible, the literature used in a classroom should come from the community that it is intended to present (Jones & Moomaw, 2002; Reese, 2019). There are multiple resources available to teachers and parents that would allow for accurate representations to be easily acquired.

In addition to an inclusion of Indigenous literature, an exclusion of inappropriate materials should also occur which sees to the removal of texts and examples that misrepresent a peoples and that continues to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and further dangerous narratives. Debbie Reese (2019) discusses the importance of not only removing these examples and texts from schools and general usage, but also to engage in discussions as to why they are being set aside. This will not only remove the literature, but further a conversation about justice and equity that has often been missing in spaces for and about Indigenous perspectives. Further research should pursue how these texts are received and utilized in classrooms with Indigenous students, but also in classrooms of

students of other identities, providing insight as to how these perspectives are related to and received by the wider population.

## **7.2 Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

To conclude this study, I return to the work of Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings who in 2022 published a collection of her writings concerning culturally relevant pedagogies and set forth the work for future researchers and educators. She states, “I have contended that for culturally relevant pedagogy to remain viable, it has to shift and adapt to the changing conditions of education and the world” (p. 165). Dr. Ladson-Billings has been part of a team of researchers and writers who have taken this call for adaptations and developed what has come to be known as culturally sustaining pedagogies. Theories that continue to center student achievement and cultural background but work towards maintaining and building their culture. In this section, I will briefly provide various perspectives on how this dissertation moves towards an act of sustaining the North Mesa community’s culture by providing examples of how this is being done by the teachers and staff at the elementary school.

Culturally sustaining pedagogies take the concepts discussed in previous chapters, and move them out of a White gaze, “that permeates educational research and practice with and for students of color, their teachers, and their schools” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 2). The work that is being done in the classrooms of North Mesa align with these ideals by centering knowledge and learning in the local tribal community’s perspective and knowledge. The centering of these knowledges is an act of racial justice and social transformation in a space that has denied these perspectives for century. When students respond with excited comments such as, “Hey! That looks



like me!” as described by Melissa, the culture the students are situated in is promoted and sustained, allowing that individual to make future connections and continue the work of having their lives reflected in the curriculum. Tiffany Lee and Tessa McCarty (2017) stress however, that culturally sustaining pedagogies must also include revitalization.

Lee and McCarty explain that whether schools are on or off tribal lands, they are accountable to the nations whose children they serve, as is the case with North Mesa. The act of revitalizing is a piece of the instruction that is described in the study but building stories and contexts from local knowledges as pieces of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The students have access to multiple community-desired competencies, such as the language and histories of the nation while completing measures and requirements set forth by the state’s public education body. Amanda Holmes and Norma González (2017) point out that Indigenous methodologies and pedagogies are rooted in deep cultural memory and meaning making. The teachers and administrators at North Mesa are engaging in this balance between local knowledge and public-school requirements with various levels of success.

When asked how she would answer the question, “Are your students successful?”, Stella gave a very detailed and nuanced response. During her time as a classroom teacher, she has twice seen students make 2 years’ growth as indicated by student performance on standardized assessments. However, she cites COVID as being a hinderance to student success, though students are making progress through an understanding of personal responsibility. The largest determining factor she describes is student motivation and their willingness to learn and be more independent. Students are responsible for their performance, but it has fallen to the teachers to make learning and accessible and create spaces where the students can see the value in their work and understanding.

What the teachers in North Mesa see as being everyday practice and instruction, to an outsider, the school is participating in culturally sustaining practices to the best of their abilities. This is achieved through relationships established and maintained with the local community where appropriate. Not fully school based, and not fully community based, the classrooms of North Mesa elementary are co-created truth spaces, “rooted in culturally situated respect, reciprocity, and responsibility” (San Pedro, 2017, p. 103). There is still work to be done, and many more challenges to face, but one must look beyond just test scores and reports to understand how the needs of the students are being met both academically and culturally. One cannot exist without the other. “...tribal sovereignty must include education sovereignty” (Lee & McCarty, 2017). Through the use of local stories, there is continued attempts at not only providing relevant instruction but ensuring a culturally sustaining practice in the school.

### **7.3 Limitations**

Though this study met the goals of the research questions through rigorous analysis and methodologies, some aspects of the study were limited by factors outside of my control as the researcher. The greatest being the number of participants and participant type in the study. The original proposal for this study included teachers, staff, administrators, and community members. However, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, many individuals were focused on making it through a school year or took on extra duties due to the ever changing nature of instructional delivery, or as reported by one person, just trying to survive. Those individuals who took part provided details and understanding of pedagogies and practice that informed this study and future research and their contributions are greatly appreciated.

Along these lines, it would have been an interesting data point to include perspectives of the culture and language teachers who are referenced so frequently in the data, but whose voices are missing in the interviews. Due to time constraints put on the teachers by the ongoing global pandemic and frequent shifts in instructional delivery, all staff members were informed that filling out the survey and participating in the interviews was voluntary and unfortunately, none of these teachers chose to complete the survey. The perspectives of the culture and language teachers would have provided a different perspective of how the implementation of local contexts is enacted. This is a possibility for further study if the right conditions exist for a wider population of participants.

Additionally, this dissertation study would have benefited from the inclusion of examples of curriculum and materials used in ELA instruction. Many of the interviews were conducted on evenings and weekends when the teachers were no longer in their classrooms and did not have their curriculum on hand. Discussions about the materials were being used relied on trusting the educators that what they were saying as true. Follow up did occur asking for examples to be sent, but these did not come to fruition. It should also be noted that culturally sensitive materials created and provided by tribal members could not be included due to the privacy concerns of the community.

A third limitation of the study is the lack of perspective from educators of students of other cultural groups that do not identify as Native American or Indigenous. Determining how these educators' approach and speak about Native or Indigenous representations in curricular materials or literature would have provided an interesting perspective from which to compare the experiences of the teachers at North Mesa. However, this was beyond the scope of this particular study and logistically would have been a burden to try and incorporate. It is mentioned here as how it is a perspective worth considering in future research and was considered as a possibility for this study prior to the finalization of the study proposal. It was eliminated to ensure fidelity to the

research questions and a development of a robust understanding of their findings. Research possibilities are numerous, and specific parameter were set and followed.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

The early plans for this study intended to understand how teachers in an Indigenous-serving school made sense of English Language Arts curriculum that wasn't always appropriate regarding representation and knowledge. In the years since those initial ideas were crafted, the social and emotional worlds of the students at North Mesa Elementary were altered forever by state reporting and a deadly global pandemic. However, the teachers and administrators continued their work to create the most enriching and valuable instruction possible. This meant altering the delivery of instruction and finding new ways of presenting information. Therefore, this study also needed to change.

To better understand how the staff adapted local learnings, by infusing the curriculum with local contexts, the focus of the study expanded to include the whole school. The data collection was repeatedly stalled and in jeopardy due to the pandemic as well as frequent turnover of administration at the district level since the beginning of 2020. What information was obtained through the number of participants interviewed shows that despite these obstacles, the teachers, staff, administration, and community at large, still maintain high expectations of the work the school engages in, showing an effort of bridging school-based and local knowledges.

North Mesa Elementary is a school created by a colonizing society whose original intent was assimilation, but the teachers and administrators are looking to take control of the knowledge and make it a place of respect and knowledge rooted in the history and the culture of the

community. The challenges continue as the State of New Mexico still measures success by narrow means not considering the whole child, and the teachers and staff are continually working to bring up those test scores to show the value of the instruction and pedagogies occurring within the day-to-day learning experiences of the children. However, the information contained here explicitly shows the power a school and community can share when stories are turned into practice.

## Appendix A Literature Review

**Table 4 Literature Read for Understanding**

Author(s)	Year	Title	Place	Included	Notes on Inclusion/Exclusion
		Teaching History for Truth and Reconciliation: The Challenges and Opportunities of Narrativity, Temporality and Identity	Canada	No	This piece spoke more to TRC report than specifically to the issues of identity in curriculum.
James Miles	2018				
		Teaching English Critically to Mexican Children	Mexico	Yes	
Mario E. Lopez-Gopar	2014				
		Tools for Iina (Life): The Journey of the Iina Curriculum to the Glittering World	United States	Yes	
Arviso et. al	2012				
		Tracing spectres of whiteness: discourse and the construction of teaching subjects in urban Aboriginal education	Canada	Yes	
Brooke Madden	2016				
		Affirming Identity: The Role of Language and Culture in American Indian Education	United States	No	Could not confirm rigorous peer review for this study
Jon Reyhner	2017				
		Critical Latinx Indigenities: Unpacking Indigeneity from Within and Outside of Latinized Entanglements	United States/Mexico	Yes	
Luis Urrieta, Jr. Melissa Mesinas Ramon Antonio Martinez	2019				

			Indigenous			
			Mexican culture, identity and academic aspirations: results from a community-based curriculum project for	United States		
Nora Luna						
William P. Evans						
Bret Davis	2015		Latina/Latino students	States		Yes
			Rooted Indigenous core values: Culturally appropriate curriculum and methods for civic education			
Jessica						This article was written as an informational piece for one charter school in Albuquerque, NM. Not appropriate for this study.
Helen Lopez			reflective of Native American culture and learning styles	United States		
Kara L. Bobroff	2019					No
			Unlearning Colonial Identities while engaging in relationality: settler teachers' education as reconciliation	Canada		Yes
Lisa Korteweg						
Tesa Fiddler	2018					
				Centered in Canada, but		
			Enhancing school mathematics culturally: A Path of reconciliation	perspectives from around the world are included.		Yes
Glen S. Aikenhead	2017					
			Addressing Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Indigenous peoples through religious literacy and spirituality: Unexpected pathways to peace education	Canada		Yes
W. Y. Alice Chan						
Harriett Akanmori						
Christina Parker	2019					
			Uncovering Settler Grammars in Curriculum	U.S.		Yes
Dolores Calderon	2014					
			"Now You Can't Just Do Nothing": Unsettling	U.S.		Yes
Christine Stanton	2019					

			the Settler Self within Social Studies Education			
			Child-directed Dramatic Play as Identity			
Shelley Stagg Peterson			Text in Northern Canadian Indigenous Kindergarten			
Laura Horton	2018		Classrooms	Canada	Yes	
M. Kristiina Montero						
Cassandra Bice-Zaugg						
Makwa Oshwenh- Adam Cyril John			Activist Literacies: Validating Aboriginality			
Marsh			Through Visual and Literary			
Jim Cummins	2013		Identity Texts	Canada	Yes	
Alexandra Bissell			Digital Narratives as a Means of Shifting Settler-Teacher Horizons			
Lisa Korteweg	2016		toward Reconciliation	Canada	Yes	
Franklin S. Allaire			Navigating Rough Waters: Hawaiian Science			
	2013		Teachers Discuss Identity	Hawai'i	Yes	
Michelle A. Honeyford			Burrowing and becoming: Teaching writing			Did not deal specifically with Native and Indigenous identities.
Jennifer Watt	2018		in uncertain times	Canada	No	Only tangentially mentioned that the study occurred in a province with a high population of First Nations, Indigenous, and Metis.
Anthony L. Brown			Race, Memory, and Master Narratives: A Critical Essay on U.S.	United		
Wayne Au	2014		Curriculum History	States	Yes	



		Transformative			
		Autoethnography: An			This was an
		examination of cultural			autoethnographic account
Brent E.		Identity and its implications	United		and did not speak to
Sykes	2014	for learners	States	No	larger issues of identity.
		Race and culture			
		in the secondary school health			
		and physical education			
LeAnne		curriculum in Ontario,			
Petherick	2018	Canada	Canada	Yes	

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## Appendix B Participant Information

**Table 5 Participant Information**

Name	Role	Self-Identity	Years of Experience (in North Mesa)
Roberta	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Classroom Teacher	Filipino	13(2)
Stella	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Classroom Teacher	White/Native American (different tribe)	40(40)
Cathy	Reading Interventionist	Filipino	26(1)
Melissa	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Classroom Teacher	Hispanic/Latina	26(1)
Irene	Principal	Native American (tribal)	9(3)

## Appendix C Interview Protocol

### *Teacher Interview*

The participants in this sub-group are teachers in the school where data was collected. Utilizing the video conferencing platform Zoom, the participants answered questions about their teacher training, instructional choices, understanding and application of theory as well as providing examples of the day-to-day processes in their classroom. Each interview, three in total, lasted approximately one hour and was recorded using the platform's software. Recordings will be kept on a password protected, cloud-based storage system, provided by the university. **Interview 1**

- What brought you to teaching?
  - What interested you in this study?
  - What do you enjoy most about teaching?
- How long have you been teaching?
  - In your career?
  - In this school/grade level?
- Do you remember what motivated you to become a teacher?
- Where did you receive your training to become a licensed teacher?
  - How did your program address issues of culture and race?
  - Do you feel your program adequately prepared you to teach in this environment/school?

- How would you describe your teaching style?
  - How do you feel your students respond?
  
- Can you explain to me what you understand ‘culturally relevant’ to mean?
  - How have you come to define it in this way?
  - How was it addressed in
    - Teacher training
    - Professional development
  - How do you see this being implemented?
    - In the school
    - In your practice
  
- **Interview 2**
  
- What curriculum does your school use for English/Language Arts?
  - Have you received training on how to implement it?
  - What is your administrator’s expectations for implementation and fidelity?
  
- Do you believe this curriculum to be culturally/relevant for your students?
  - Why/why not?
  - Have the students commented on this point?
    - Do you think they would agree with you on the quality of the representations?

- Are you able to supplement the curriculum with materials?
  - If so, what do you use?
  - If not, what are the reasons?
  
- Tell me how you address NA/I/FN representations in the text?
  - Do you do any research on the group that is intended to be represented?
  - How do you talk with your students about the representation?
  
- Can you show me an example of what you believe to be an appropriate and accurate representation?
  - What makes this an exemplar?
  - Are there any issues you've discovered despite its accuracy?
  
- Can you show me an example that isn't valuable to your students?
  - What makes this problematic?
  - Is there any value to be taken from this example?
  
- Have you ever avoided a part of your curricular materials?
  - What caused you to question the piece you omitted?
  - Was this influenced by another person or entity, such as the district?
  
- What challenges have arisen when teaching the curriculum?
  
- **Interview 3**

- How much community input do you incorporate into your instruction?
  - What resources are available to you through community groups or organizations?
- What are some examples of collaboration that have occurred to make instruction more culturally relevant and appropriate?
  - In the school?
  - With community entities/groups?
  - With parents?
- How important is it to incorporate these collaborations into your instruction?
- What policies/programs exist that make these collaborations possible?
- Do your goals and the goals of the school align when it comes to culturally responsive instruction?
  - How do they align?
  - How do they differ?

### **Administrator Interview**

The participant in this sub-group is the principal of the school and was interviewed using the protocol below. Due to scheduling concerns and the responsibilities that fell to the administrator during another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview questions were transferred to a Google Document that allowed for collaboration and follow up within the

document itself. Upon completion it was converted to a Microsoft Word document and stored on a password protected cloud-based storage system.

- **Interview 1**

- What brought you to education?
  - What other roles have you served in this school/other schools?
  - What do you enjoy most about your role?
- How long have you been an administrator?
  - In your career?
  - In this school?
- Do you remember what motivated you to enter education?
- Where did you receive your training to become a licensed teacher?
  - How did your program address issues of culture and race?
  - Do you feel your program adequately prepared you to teach in this environment/school?
- Where did you receive your training to become a licensed administrator?
  - How did your program address issues of culture and race?
  - Do you feel your program adequately prepared you to work in this environment/school?
- What curriculum does your school use for English/Language Arts?

- Do you offer training or PD for your staff on how to implement it?
- What are your expectations for implementation and fidelity?
- Do you believe this curriculum to be culturally/relevant for your students?
  - Why/why not?
  - Have the students commented on this point?
    - Do you think they would agree with you on the quality of the representations?
- Are the teachers able to supplement the curriculum with materials of their choosing?
  - If so, what approval process must they go through?
  - If not, can you explain why?
- **Interview 2**
- How much community input do you incorporate into your school?
  - What resources are available to you through community groups or organizations?
- What are some examples of collaboration that have occurred to make instruction more culturally relevant and appropriate?
  - In the school?
  - With community entities/groups?
  - With parents?
- How important is it to incorporate these collaborations within instruction?



- What policies/programs exist that make these collaborations possible?
- Do your goals and the goals of the school align when it comes to culturally responsive instruction?
  - How do they align?
  - How do they differ?

### **Staff Member Interview<sup>12</sup>**

The participants in this sub-group are educational assistants, teachers' aides, in the school where data will be collected and will be interviewed using the protocol below. Using the video conferencing platform Zoom, the participants will answer questions about their experience as an educator, roles and responsibilities, understanding of application of theory, and interaction and feedback on curriculum used. The one interview participants will take place in will last one hour and will be recorded using the platforms software. Recordings will be kept on a password protected, cloud-based storage system, provided by the university. What is your official title in the school?

- What does your job entail?
- Were you required to go through any formal schooling for this position?
- How long have you worked in this position?

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<sup>12</sup> Despite two employees filling out the interest survey, neither expressed interest in being interviewed. Therefore, these protocols were not utilized for the study. Regardless, they are included here in the event further research is conducted based on the findings of this study.

- In this school?
- Do you have any other experience working in this or another school?
- What's your educational background?
  - How were conversations on race and culture handled in your education?
    - If discussed, how were they presented?
    - If not, why do you think it wasn't discussed?
- In your current or any previous position, are you responsible for instruction?
  - What does that look like?
  - Would you change how instruction is delivered?
    - If so, tell me what that would look like.
- Tell me about the curriculum you have either used, or seen implemented in the school?
  - Do you feel that this is culturally appropriate/relevant for the students?
    - Tell me more about that.

### **Community Interview<sup>13</sup>**

The participants in this sub-group are community members, (parents, family members, tribal employees) in the surrounding area of the school and will be interviewed using the protocol

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<sup>13</sup> As described in the Methods chapter, no parents took part in the survey or interview process. These protocols were not used during this study. Despite their being no participants in this subgroup, they are included here in the event further research is conducted based on the findings of this study.

below. Using the video conferencing platform Zoom, the participants will answer questions about relationship to the school, perceptions of instructional choices, feedback for teachers and staff. The interview will last one hour and will be recorded using the platforms software. Recordings will be kept on a password protected, cloud-based storage system, provided by the university.

- What is your relationship with the school?
  - What kinds of activities (conferences, books fairs, performances, etc.) have you taken part in at the school?
- Tell me about how you feel you and your family fit into the school dynamic.
  - Can you elaborate on what makes you feel welcome? Or Can you describe what may be preventing you from feeling welcome?
- Do you see your family, your values, and the community as a whole represented in the school?
  - Tell me more about what you see/do not see in the school?
- Have you ever participated in any discussions about the curriculum or instructional delivery in the school?
  - Can you expand on this?
  - If asked, would you be willing to participate?
    - What would be some things you would discuss with administrators, teachers, and other decision makers in the school?

## Appendix D Codebook

**Table 6 Descriptive Coding**

Code	Examples
Curricular	Detailed Description
Choices	<p>The foundation of this study is centered in curricular materials, and the choices that teachers make to either teach a context, or omit it from instruction. This refers to not only text-based materials but any type of media that is used in the classroom.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Inclusion Criteria</p> <p>This code is used when the teacher speaks specifically to the curriculum or other materials used in an instructional activity.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">“I’m replacing the HMH curriculum, but I’m using the concepts of compare and contrast using different forms of literature to compare from different sources. I’m using</p>

sequencing, I'm using  
spelling, I'm using  
comprehension, I'm using  
compare and contrast, I'm  
using research, I'm using  
comparing the story they're  
listening to to possibly one  
that they've heard from  
here.”

#### Exclusion Criteria

When a teacher specifically talks  
about a piece of children’s literature, this  
code will not be used, as it is included in a  
separate code (see below).

I have my own  
Native American books for  
one thing. I'm doing  
Cherokee Rabbit stories,  
I'm doing a Zuni tale, I've  
got a poetry book, that's  
*Thirteen Moons on a  
Turtle's Back.*

Student	Detailed Description
Performance	

Student success is measured in a variety of ways by schools and educators. Sometimes it is indicated by test scores, and other times on more holistic measures such as engagement, participation or other measures not indicated on performance based reporting.

#### Inclusion Criteria

This code is used any time a teacher spoke about student performance, desired or not, regarding curriculum, instruction, or assessment. That's why I said the curriculum is really pretty good but honestly, I think the student is not yet prepared, especially this time because it's pandemic.

#### Exclusion Criteria

This code was not applied to instances where the conversation about the students' performance occurred outside of instruction, such as free time, recess, or transitions not related to designated learning time. It was nice. It was for the kids to meet them [Tribal leaders] for them to welcome them back. One of them was for safety. The importance of-- I think

we've had two, three, maybe one for Halloween trick or treating safety, for the kids to just acknowledge that they're the leaders of their nation.

## Literature

### Detailed Description

The use of high-quality children's literature has been a theme that emerged in many previous studies. More texts published by and for Indigenous peoples are now available in mainstream markets as well as a greater recognition of their use in instructional spaces is becoming more common.

### Inclusion Criteria

When teachers make reference to a specific piece of literature, or discuss texts in general, this code was applied.

I have my own Native American books for one thing. I'm doing Cherokee Rabbit stories, I'm doing a Zuni tale, I've

got a poetry book, that's  
*Thirteen Moons on a  
Turtle's Back.*

### Exclusion Criteria

Discussions about curricular materials such as textbooks and other required elements are not included as they are coded separately (see above).

“I'm replacing the HMH curriculum, but I'm using the concepts of compare and contrast using different forms of literature to compare from different sources. I'm using sequencing, I'm using spelling, I'm using comprehension, I'm using compare and contrast, I'm using research, I'm using comparing the story they're listening to to possibly one that they've heard from here.”

Community

Detailed Description



The goal of this study is to answer questions about how teachers, administrators, and staff use local contexts and understandings instructional spaces. The use of local funds of knowledge is vital to the understanding of the goals of this study.

#### Inclusion Criteria

Conversations concerning the role that the community plays in instruction, as well as what the impact the teachers and curriculum have outside of the school building are included in this code. I would find out from my parents who was willing to come in or had something to contribute anything from stories to a craft to about their job. I had one set up last year and then she never did come through doing it, but she works for the tribe as an accountant and I was going to have her come and talk about how the importance

of math and the math on her job.

### Exclusion Criteria

When discussions occur about community interactions, but are not specifically related to instruction are not included in this code.

I had to ask about that and I was like, "No, I'm not tribal. I don't have any papers. I'm good. Can I still buy gas?" Things like that because you don't know what-- In the community they're really to themselves and they keep their traditions and what they find, they keep it close to their chest and not a lot of sharing with anybody that's non-tribal, so it's difficult.

**Table 7 Value Coding**

Code	Framing information
Culture	<p data-bbox="837 370 1104 394"><b>Detailed Description</b></p> <p data-bbox="743 407 1898 472">Brayboy describes culture as being both fluid and dynamic, and fixed or stable. It is tied to a people and a place.</p> <p data-bbox="837 599 1062 623"><b>Inclusion Criteria</b></p> <p data-bbox="743 636 1898 737">This code will be used when teachers, administrators, staff members or community members make specific reference to the culture of the community in which they teach. It can be placed either historically or contemporarily.</p> <p data-bbox="837 863 1073 888"><b>Exclusion Criteria</b></p> <p data-bbox="743 901 1898 966">When talking about Native American/Indigenous/First Nations peoples, this code will not apply as it cannot be linked directly to a group of people or a place.</p> <p data-bbox="837 1131 1125 1156"><b>Examples of Evidence</b></p> <ul data-bbox="793 1169 1866 1330" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="793 1169 1866 1234">● Data concerning the cultural and language course that each student is required to take.</li><li data-bbox="793 1263 1866 1330">● Local, cultural, and historical stories and tales related to the people, place, and education of the community.</li></ul>

## Knowledge

### Detailed Description

Knowledge is defined in TribalCrit as recognizing change, adapting, and moving forward with the change. While Brayboy discusses three types of knowledge, this code will focus on academic knowledge which blends school based and cultural knowledges.

### Inclusion Criteria

When participants make connections between the community and the school, this code will be used for those responses.

### Exclusion Criteria

If a response speaks of school-based or community-based knowledges separate from one another, it does not fall into this classification.

### Examples of Evidence

- Data concerning the overlap of local knowledge and school-based knowledge.
- Data concerning a gap between local and school-based knowledge.
- Plans for improving culturally responsive pedagogy and instruction.

## Power

### Detailed Description

It is made clear in TribalCrit that power is not a property or trait, but an ability to define themselves, their place in the world, and their traditions.

### Inclusion Criteria

This will be used when teachers speak to students taking ownership of learning and representations and acknowledging their place in the instruction.

### Exclusion Criteria

Political power and issues of oppression and assimilation, while important points of discussion and will be sorted using other codes, are not appropriate for this particular piece of analysis.

### Examples of evidence

- Data that focuses on identity and how it impacts instruction and learning
  - Of interviewee
  - Of student
  - Of community
- Relationship of the interviewee to:

- The school community
    - Teachers
    - Administrators
    - Staff
  - The tribal community
  - Student data
    - Assessments
    - Report cards
    - Non-measured achievements
      - Teacher observations
      - Anecdotal records
      - Parental input (if available)
-

**Table 8 Pattern Coding - Community and Knowledge**

Code	Framing Information
Stakeholder Inquiry	<p data-bbox="930 348 1198 380">Detailed Description</p> <p data-bbox="834 447 1419 842">Multiple participants in the study mentioned asking directly of community members and other stakeholders when determining what materials and contexts would be appropriate for inclusion in instruction.</p> <p data-bbox="930 909 1154 940">Inclusion Criteria</p> <p data-bbox="834 1003 1419 1251">This code was applied when the teacher directly mentioned that they sought understanding and asked questions of individuals outside of their classroom.</p> <p data-bbox="930 1318 1166 1350">Exclusion Criteria</p> <p data-bbox="834 1413 1419 1734">Instances where the teachers were directed to include something or were approached by administration or community members were instances where this code was applied.</p> <p data-bbox="930 1801 1219 1833">Examples of Evidence</p>

Then if I need to make a plans, I should have to ask the [Tribal Nation] people if, "Is it okay to make this one? Or if you have some suggestion we can try the one or something like that."

## Guests

### Detailed Description

When teachers wanted to make their instruction more culturally relevant and appropriate when relating it to the students' lives, they often invited guests to speak in the classroom regarding local histories or present contexts important for life after formal schooling ended.

### Inclusion Criteria

When teachers shared stories of community members coming to the classroom as guest speakers.

### Exclusion Criteria

When whole school events were held, those pieces of data were considered for a



different coding structure. This code only applied to specific classroom contexts.

#### Examples of Evidence

He came in and spent a really interesting hour doing that. I had another person come in. Mr. Dunlap came in one time and brought in various hides for science and explained the different animals that live on the reservation and how he traps and or uses the hides and how hides are used in the local area and the various hides and what their uses are.

#### Organizations

#### Detailed Description

Local organizations, such as the tribe's cultural center and the department of education were a frequently mentioned resource for the teachers.

#### Inclusion Criteria

This code was applied when a local organization was discussed as being a resource for pedagogy and/or instruction.

#### Exclusion Criteria

Larger organizations outside of the community, state or national, were not considered for this code.

#### Examples of Evidence

I was able to connect just very recently with a Nation, and then I was able to connect with them saying that I need to collaborate with my student council and the leaders of the community. I also communicated with the [Tribal Nation] Culture [sic] Center, where they're thinking of communicating or collaborating with projects of the community to that of my student council.

#### Parents and Families

#### Detailed Description

The parents and families of students played an important role for the teachers as many of them came to rely on their input for instruction and planning.

#### Inclusion Criteria

When teachers made direction mention of parents or families of their students, this code was applied.

#### Exclusion Criteria

This code was not applied when discussing individuals or groups who did not have a direct link to the students, such as the cultural center or the Junior Library League.

#### Examples of Evidence

All that I have collected and learned, I incorporate and give to teachers. Families and my own extended family have made contributions for [North Mesa] elementary academics.

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**Table 9 Pattern Coding - Curricular Choices and Knowledge**

Code	Framing Information
Review	<p data-bbox="922 352 1190 384">Detailed Description</p> <p data-bbox="824 447 1422 772">Each teacher engaged in regular reviews of curricular materials. Often times they spoke about this process being a vital part of lesson planning, and one that produced unexpected outcomes.</p> <p data-bbox="922 835 1146 867">Inclusion Criteria</p> <p data-bbox="824 930 1422 1035">When teachers mentioned specific acts of review of materials, this code was applied.</p> <p data-bbox="922 1098 1157 1129">Exclusion Criteria</p> <p data-bbox="824 1192 1422 1371">Required trainings and professional development meetings were not included in this coding structure.</p> <p data-bbox="922 1434 1211 1465">Examples of Evidence</p> <p data-bbox="824 1528 1422 1854">The cultural part is very difficult because I'm Hispanic, I have relatively little knowledge of in-depth Jicarilla culture and they're so, just for whatever reason, good or bad, just so protective of their culture part of it</p>

if you're not Native American. It's hard to incorporate culture into teaching the long 'A' sound. I don't know how to. It's difficult to-- how do you incorporate the culture of doing that?

## Adaptations

### Detailed Description

A frequent practice of the teachers in the study was the adaptation of curriculum materials to make the materials more appropriate and relevant for the students.

### Inclusion Criteria

Examples of altering materials for the students was used for this code.

### Exclusion Criteria

Using a wholly different piece of literature was not included in this code, only instances where materials were changed.

### Examples of Evidence

In the lesson plan, we have to put there our connection to the connection of our lesson to the [Tribal Nation] traditions, and cultures.

We got terms, we got association of vocabularies from English to that of the native language. Whenever it is possible, I would emphasize values integration, which I could feel that our culture as Filipinos, because I'm a Filipino, it has a little bit of a connection, there is a click to that Filipinos and that of the Native American culture. As much as possible, I have to make sure to target morals, and to integrate it into the lives of the students.

## Omissions

### Detailed Description

For several reasons, cultural taboos or unfamiliar contexts, some items were removed from the curriculum. Sometimes they were replaced, other times not.

### Inclusion Criteria

The code of omission was applied when teachers made specific mention of removing a story, example, or other material.

### Exclusion Criteria

This does not apply to instances where materials were adapted for instruction.

#### Examples of Evidence

If there's things that is not fit for Jicarilla people, then I will not going to teach it. I need to skip that and find another way or another stories that is fit for that topic that I am going to teach and then I just feel better.

### Tools

#### Detailed Description

Throughout the interviews, the participants would mention specific tools they used to adapt instruction and curricular materials.

#### Inclusion Criteria

This code was used when teachers made specific mention of materials and tools that were not an original part of the curriculum sets.

#### Exclusion Criteria

Pieces of curriculum sets that were adapted or inserted into instruction were not included in this coding structure.

#### Examples of Evidence

Well, it's helpful with my app because you have the word and there is this video that will help you to pronounce the words, what if there's none? What if I could not find it? That's where the hole is, that's where the gap is, and I don't know where to find it.

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## Appendix E Coding Map

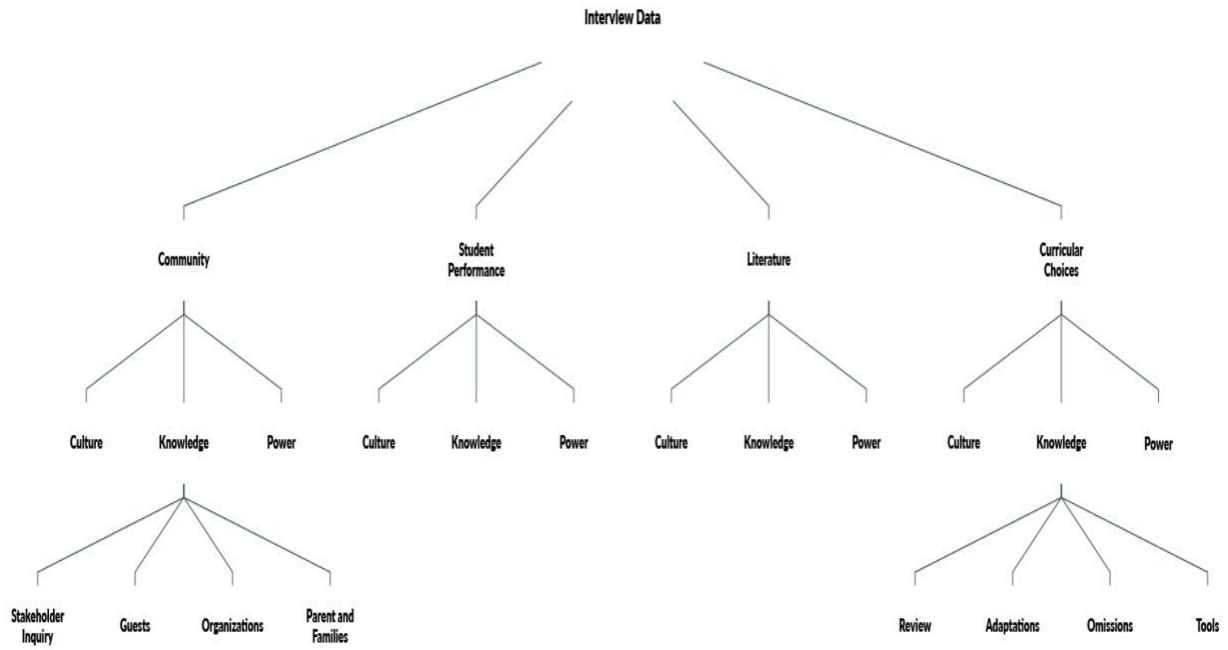


Figure 11 Coding Map

## Appendix F Children’s Literature Review

**Table 10 Children's Literature Resource Review**

Author(s)	Year	Title	Place	Database	Notes
Chang	2016	Spirits in the Material World: Ecocentrism in Native American Culture and Louise Erdrich’s <i>Chickadee</i>	Global	ERIC	Included, but then not used. The scope was too narrow for the study, a fact only realized after a deep analysis.
Dénomme & Welch & Montero	2014	De/Colonizing Preservice Teacher Education: Theatre of the Academic Absurd	Canada	ERIC	
Gangi	2008	The Unbearable Whiteness of Literacy Instruction: Realizing the Implications of the Proficient Reader Research	United States		Ancestral Source
Jones & Moomaw	2002	Lessons from Turtle Island: Native Curriculum in	United States		Ancestral Source

Early Childhood Classrooms					
Justice	2018	Why Indigenous Literacies Matter	Canada		Ancestral Source
Justice, Dynia, Hijlkema, & Sánchez Chan	2020	Designing and Implementing a Bilingual Early-Literacy Program in Indigenous Mexico Villages: Family, Child, and Classroom Outcomes	Mexico	ERIC	Typically, Mexico contexts were omitted from previous reviews, however, the nature of the program described warranted inclusion.
Kovach	2009	Indigenous Methodologies	Canada		Ancestral Source
Larrick	1991	The All-White World of Children's Literature	United States		Ancestral Source
Meyer	2011	Selecting Diverse Resources of Native American Perspective for the Curriculum Center: Children's Literature, Leveled Readers, and Social Studies Curriculum	United States	LLIS	

Neuman & Celano	200 1	Access to Print in Low-Income and Middle-Income Communities: An Ecological Study of Four Neighborhoods	United States	Ancestral Source
O'Reilly	201 5	Dynamic Voices, New Audiences: The Challenges and Successes in Publishing Aboriginal Stories	Canada	LLIS
Peterson & Robinson	202 0	Rights of Indigenous Children's Literature through an Indigenous Knowledge Lens	Canada	ERIC
Reese	201 5	Join the Diversity Discussion	United States	LLIS
Reese	201 7	When Worlds Collide: Recent Developments in Children's Literature	United States	ERIC & LLIS
Reese	201 9	An Indigenous Critique of	United States	LLIS

Whiteness in  
Children's Literature

Sims	198	What Has	United	Ancestra
	3	Happened to the 'All- White' World of Children's Books?	d States	1 Source
Smith	201	Decolonizing	New	Ancestra
	2	Methodologies	Zealand	1 Source

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## Appendix G Children's Literature Coding Maps

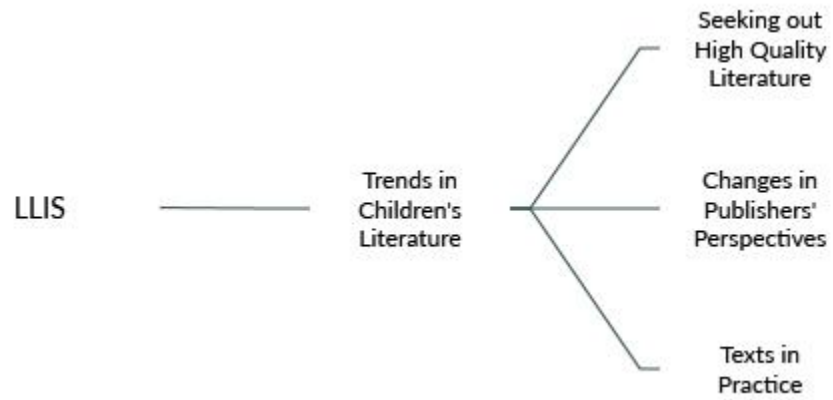


Figure 12 Coding Map for LLIS Search

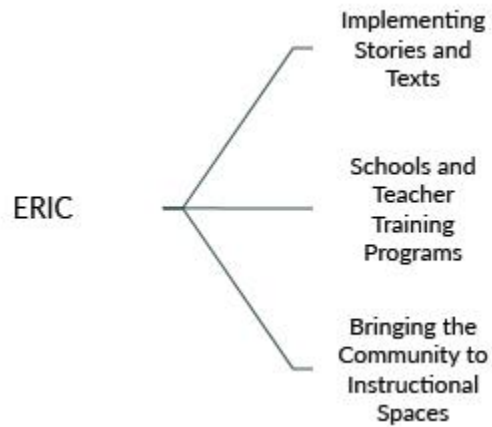
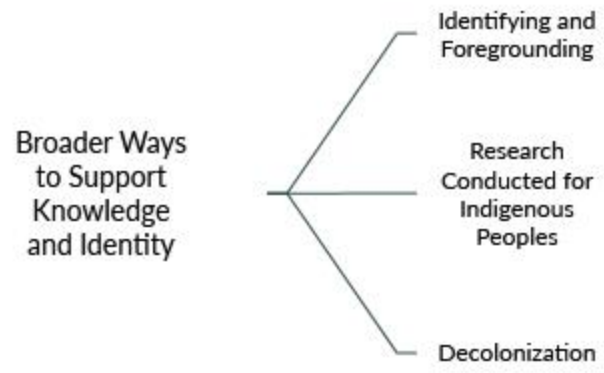


Figure 13 Coding Map for ERIC Search



**Figure 14 Broader Ways to Support Knowledge Map**

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