

Indigenous Teacher Education Is Nation Building: Reflections of Capacity Building and Capacity Strengthening in Idaho

Journal of School Leadership

1–24

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DOI: 10.1177/1052684620951722

journals.sagepub.com/home/jsl

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Abstract

This article discusses the efforts of the Indigenous Knowledge for Effective Education Program (IKEEP), at the University of Idaho, a predominately white institution (PWI) of higher education, and its struggle to create space in higher education for intentional support of Indigenous self-determination, sovereignty, and Tribal nation building through the preparation of Indigenous teachers. In doing so, we examine the contentious and local work of reimagining education, from the bottom up and top down, to develop leaders to serve the needs of Indigenous youth and communities through the vehicle of mainstream institutions. With data from a multiyear ethnographic documentation, we examine the experiences of IKEEP program administration, teacher mentors, and students through the conceptual lens of Tribal nation building in higher education. Our findings underscore how teacher education programs at PWIs need to engage in a radical shift toward seeing Indigenous teachers as nation builders and to prioritize the infrastructure and programmatic collaboration to support them and their communities as such.

Keywords

Indigenous education, teacher education, nation building, mentorship, culturally relevant education

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Introduction

The United States has failed to provide adequate educational conditions, services, and supports to Indigenous peoples (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). In response, many Indigenous community members and scholars advocate for culturally responsive schooling as a way to improve the educational and academic experiences of Indigenous youth (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Culturally responsive schooling calls upon schools "... to acknowledge the unique needs of diverse students, take action to address those needs, and adapt approaches as students' needs and demographics change over time" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 947). While culturally responsive schooling has gained increased attention over the past two decades as a way to rethink pedagogy, curriculum, school–community relationships, and school leadership in an effort to improve the inequitable educational outcomes for many students of color in the U.S. (Howard, 2010), we believe that sovereignty and self-determination must be viewed as the bedrock of any discussion related to the state of education in Indigenous communities (Lomawaima, 2000), and thus are central to the provision of culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth and communities. While we take these statements as truth, the practice of transforming P-20 educational systems that "have purposefully and systematically worked to eradicate Native languages, religions, beliefs, and practices" (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002, p. 282) into systems that not only offer adequate services and supports to Indigenous youth, but also sustain and revitalize Indigenous cultural practices, is complex, contentious, and requires local mobilization and guidance (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

This article discusses the efforts of the Indigenous Knowledge for Effective Education Program (IKEEP), at the University of Idaho, a predominately white institution (PWI) of higher education, located in a state that has historically adopted a hostile stance toward Tribal communities, and its struggle to create space in higher education for intentional support of Indigenous self-determination, sovereignty, and Tribal nation building through the preparation of Indigenous teachers. IKEEP builds on decades long scholarship, institutional programming, and activism among scholars and community members regarding the need to prepare culturally responsive Indigenous teachers and school leaders for transformative change in Indian Country (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Carpluk & Leonard, 2017; Castagno et al., 2015; Demmert, 2001; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2013). IKEEP's effort is one of many across North America that challenge and transform higher education to secure a reality of degreed community based educators through a commitment to honor and strengthen the knowledge and experiences Indigenous teacher candidates bring with them to teacher education (Haynes Writer & Oesterreich, 2011; Jacob et al., 2019; Kulago, 2019; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009) and a commitment to transformative educational leadership which affirms and legitimizes Indigenous students' desires to serve their communities, people, and lands. Because notions of community-based Indigenous educators are rarely recognized by the overwhelming whiteness (Sleeter, 2001) and

settler colonial structures (Kulago, 2019) of teacher education, it is important to understand how programs such as IKEEP engage in the contentious work of reimagining education, from the bottom up and top down, to serve the needs of Indigenous youth and communities.

To explore how teacher education in PWIs can work toward strengthening Indigenous communities, we ask: How does an Indigenous teacher education program at a rural, mainstream institution support the development and application of culturally responsive, self-determination centered approaches to teaching and learning with Indigenous youth? To answer this question, we examine the experiences and perspectives of IKEEP program leaders, teacher mentors, and students through the conceptual lens of Tribal nation building in higher education (Brayboy et al., 2012). Our findings show that the practice of centering Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies with Indigenous teachers, in partnership with an extended network of Tribally invested collaborators including Indigenous teacher leaders, Tribal education directors, and Indigenous university faculty, staff, and administration, is situated within broader intergenerational processes of Indigenous persistence, resilience, and community agency committed to strengthening the next generation of nation builders. We also use IKEEP to challenge our conceptualizations of educational leadership. In the specific cultural reality of IKEEP, leadership is seen as a collective effort, including Indigenous mentor teachers, tribal community members, and university allies involved in varied efforts of Native educational programming. We use our findings to underscore how teacher education programs at PWIs need to engage in a radical shift toward *seeing* Indigenous teachers as nation builders and to prioritize the infrastructure and programmatic collaboration to support them and their communities as such.

Review of Literature

Research on Indigenous postsecondary persistence consistently reveals low enrollment and graduation rates in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups (Brayboy et al., 2012). Alarming high push out/dropout rates in K-12, daily experiences of racism on college campuses, and lack of curricular or pedagogical respect for Indigenous lifeways are cited as contributing factors to the postsecondary marginalization of Indigenous students on mainstream university campuses (Brayboy et al., 2012; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Shotton et al., 2013). Unsurprisingly, many scholars have worked to unpack the nuanced individual and structural dimensions of the Indigenous postsecondary experience to propose solutions that de-invisibilize Indigenous peoples from higher education and center the experiences of Indigenous students in ways that recognize the coloniality of the academy (Makomenaw, 2012; Shotton et al., 2013). Calls to redress the marginalization of Indigenous students and “Indigenize” systems of education elevate the values of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies, such as experiential learning,

relationship to place, and the situated living cultural knowledge held in place, in ways that move beyond educational tokenism and abstraction and work to reclaim Indigenous strength (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Unfortunately, most teacher education programs reflect Euro-American values and perspectives which do not align with the values and perspectives of many Indigenous students. Programs largely focus on preparing white preservice teachers (primarily young, middle class, monolingual women) to teach ethnically and socioeconomically diverse children and adolescents (e.g., Sleeter, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Nieto, 2013). Findings from decades of robust research on cultural diversity and learning show that all preservice teachers must move beyond simplistic notions of diversity as difference, and be taught to view diversity in sociopolitical context and as an asset in classrooms rather than deficit (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Further, all teachers must be given opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and perspectives that enable them to understand their students' lives in context (Cochran-Smith et al., 2004; González et al., 2005; Milner, 2010). These calls for flexible and adaptive culturally responsive pedagogy are critical to meet the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native populations who have experienced over a century of colonization, ethnocide, and linguicide perpetuated through the public schooling in the Americas (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Today, nearly 90 percent of American Indian students attend public schools (NIES, 2015), where they have little to no exposure to Indigenous teachers and funds of knowledge, and are burdened with various obstacles such as low teacher expectations, inappropriate tracking into special education, and unfair disciplinary practices (McCarty, 2009; Sabzalian, 2019). In sum, the misalignment between educational ideologies and Indigenous experiences negatively impacts the K-12 educational experiences of Indigenous youth, thereby limiting their opportunities to pursue postsecondary education, and undermining the abilities of Indigenous communities to support and sustain their nations, both now and in the future.

Although many scholars have highlighted the importance of training culturally responsive teachers to serve the needs of Indigenous youth, innovations in culturally responsive pedagogy for Indigenous youth are not taken up on a wide scale in educational policy, educational leadership, teacher preparation, curriculum, instruction and/or school governance (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). In teacher education, intergenerational relationships and the desires of Tribal communities to sustain and revitalize cultural and linguistic knowledges continues to be at odds with the commonly used Western "pipeline" narrative of educational success which centers individuals and transactions in professionalization rather than community and holistic approaches (Brayboy et al., 2012). Specifically, the goals of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination require teachers to dedicate proper attention to respectful and reciprocal relationships toward humans and nature, and to hold "high regard for their relationships with families and communities from which they come and for whom they work" (Kulago, 2019, p. 241).

Educational leadership is cited as a significant catalyst of educational change, particularly in the realm of culturally responsive schooling. The impact of strong and supportive administrators who share the vision of a community (Rhodes, 1994) and possess the “ability and willingness to engage in culturally meaningful and appropriate practices” are seen as crucial to making culturally responsive schooling a reality in Indigenous communities (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) write that administrators and teacher leaders have a significant influence on quality and culture of a learning environment; however, they also state that successful leadership frequently understands how to draw up the many sources of potential leadership that exist within school, institutions, and the community. The work of programs such as IKEEP depend upon building networks of shared leadership to interrupt the negative experiences of Indigenous students across the educational spectrum. This involves not only directors/principal investigators (PIs) and program staff, but also teacher mentors, tribal leaders, teacher educators, and appropriate relationships with local communities to work collaboratively in preparing culturally responsive Indigenous teachers for Indigenous students, in sustained and on-going ways. This also requires leaders to embrace a shared responsibility for elevating relationships between individuals and groups, rather than emphasizing the authority of an individual leader (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015).

Critical scholar, Dr. Sandy Grande captures the complex epistemological difference, unequal power dynamics, and the need to reimagine relationships in education when she writes, “the reports testify to the fact that centuries of genocidal and assimilationist policies cannot be undone in a matter of years” (2015, p. 21). As an effort to contribute to the undoing of centuries of said policies, we examine IKEEP, a program aimed at increasing the number of culturally responsive Indigenous teachers through tribal/university partnerships, to illuminate the extent to which elements of this program’s operation contribute to bridge-building initiatives and transformational orientations that help center culturally responsive teaching for Indigenous youth in Tribal sovereignty and individual and community self-determination.

Tribal Nation Building as Guiding Framework for Education

Because axiological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions shape institutional policies and research methodologies and inform distinct ways of knowing, maintaining the status quo in educational leadership and teacher education will inherently continue a pattern of underserving Native peoples (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015). To alter this pattern, the academy must support Tribal nation building and actively establish the equitable power relationships necessary to solve complex problems rooted in centuries of educational hegemony and injustice toward Indigenous peoples through education. Transforming historically oppressive institutions and using them as tools to support Indigenous self-determination requires intentional and purposeful investment

in human and social capital to address the needs of Tribal nations and communities (Brayboy et al., 2014).

We examine teacher education and the cultivation of educational leaders through the long-standing discussion in Indigenous studies. Scholars of Indigenous studies insist institutions of higher education reckon with the “colonial project” of the academy (Leonard & Mercier, 2016; Smith, 2012), work to de-center the university as the ultimate arbiter of knowledge (Whetung & Wakefield, 2018), and enact reciprocity in co-constructing frameworks that define the content and methodologies of academic institutions when working with Indigenous communities (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). The scope of this article is not to summarize the field of Indigenous studies, but to place our discussion within larger discussions led by Indigenous scholars in the realm of decolonizing and Indigenous research, particularly in the field of education (Brayboy, 2005; Grande, 2014; Smith et al., 2019; Tuck, 2009).

We use the framework of Tribal nation building to refer to “the political, legal, spiritual, educational, and economic processes by which Indigenous peoples build, create, and strengthen local capacity to address their educational, health, legal, economic, nutritional, relational, and spatial needs” (Brayboy & Sumida Huaman, 2016, p. 141). We examine professional programs such as teacher education through the holistic lens of nation building, whereby the health and well-being of Tribal nations and communities is more important than any individual achievement (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). According to Brayboy et al. (2012), nation building in higher education is fundamentally about tribal citizens accessing and developing the skills and knowledge they deem necessary for strengthening Tribal sovereignty. Further, the nation building model includes the blending of community knowledge and knowledge gained from institutions through diverse accommodations that are flexible and adaptive, rather than assimilatory and one-size-fits-all (Brayboy et al., 2014). A nation building framework allows us to examine the development of educators and educational leaders as embedded in collective and long-term efforts of supporting and strengthening Indigenous futures—“Strong communities, strong Nations, strong community members, and strong citizens are the goals” (Brayboy et al., 2014, p. 577). Viewing teacher development through a nation building orientation interrupts the narrowness of settler colonial logics in teaching and focuses attention on processes that support reciprocity, respect, relationality, and responsibility between intuitions and tribal nations and citizens. Additionally, viewing Indigenous teacher education through a nation building framework centers attention on the needs and impacts of holistic and shared leadership guided in collaboration with diverse Indigenous voices.

Indigenous Education in the Northwest and the Establishment of Indigenous Knowledge for Effective Education Program

The context of this work is the Northwest of the United States. The Northwest is home to diverse Indigenous peoples and over 50 federally recognized Tribes in the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Each state has fought hard to establish and implement groundbreaking statutes and regulations that push public

schools to engage Indigenous histories and pedagogical sovereignty (Stanton et al., 2019; Sabzalian et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2011). In this regard, Idaho is surrounded by a variety of nation building efforts in education.

In Idaho, there are five federally recognized tribes—the Coeur d’Alene, Kootenai, Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute. The diverse cultural and geographic landscape is rich with intellectual, linguistic, cultural, and spiritual assets necessary to maintaining individual and community well-being (Jones et al., 2018). Unlike Washington and Oregon, Idaho serves a predominately rural population and ranks near last in per capita spending per student (Dearien, 2016). The schools and districts that serve the highest percentages of American Indian youth rank among the lowest in standardized testing, high school graduation rates, and go-on rates to postsecondary education (Dearien, 2016).

In 2013, the Idaho State Board of Education created the Idaho Indian Education Committee (IIEC). Official representation on the IIEC includes tribal councils, tribal education agencies, public two-year and public four-year postsecondary institutions, Bureau of Indian Education tribal school administrators, and a State Board member. The IIEC put forward a strategic plan to address the urgent failures of schools to meet the needs of Indigenous students based on two goals: (a) Increasing American Indian Academic Excellence and (b) Increasing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in K-12 and higher education. While the strategic plan was adopted by the State Board of Education, it has received an ambivalent reception at best (Anthony-Stevens, Jones, & Begay, in press) and competes for prioritization in a political context where public education programs funded to address historic inequities face resistance from state legislature (Foy, 2019). Even so, Idaho’s Indigenous youth and communities also embody a persistence that redefines success “as collectivity, contribution, and connection” (Schneider, 2020, p. 24), as seen in recent collaborations between the Office of Indian Education, the IIEC, and public university staff and faculty to mobilize change in policy and local education curriculum. These include changes to teacher professional standards that require preservice teachers to develop knowledge and skills for culturally responsive pedagogy, and increased awareness of tribal sovereignty, and respect for Indigenous knowledge (Anthony-Stevens et al., forthcoming).

In this context, IKEEP was created at the University of Idaho in 2016 with funding from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Indian Education. The program was conceptualized with the support of regional Tribal leaders active in voicing greater emphasis be placed on culturally relevant pedagogy in teacher education programs. Further, IKEEP built upon the work of the IIEC to address the critical state of Indigenous education in the region (Dearien, 2016). Low numbers of Indigenous teachers, high teacher turnover rates, and a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy were all cited as problems the IIEC wanted addressed to improve school experience of Indigenous youth (Jones et al. 2018). As such, the hard-fought advocacy of Tribal leaders in state policy circles held space for a program such as IKEEP.

The initial grant provided roughly \$1 million in tuition and programming support to prepare, certify, and provide induction support for a cohort of 12 Indigenous preservice teachers into Indigenous serving P-12 settings. In 2018, IKEEP applied for and was awarded a second grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund a second cohort of eight students. IKEEP initially recruited nine students into its inaugural cohort—six pursued undergraduate teacher education and three pursued graduate level teacher education (both elementary and secondary levels). The first cohort followed a residential design, attracting primarily younger students of traditional undergraduate college age who lived on campus. In 2019, IKEEP recruited a second cohort of eight scholars comprised predominantly of students pursuing graduate level teacher education as distance learners. Between the two cohorts, IKEEP scholars have represented eleven different tribal nations spanning six states—Idaho, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Alaska. The challenges of building a new program to serve a wide range of students (residential and distance) and degree pathways (elementary and secondary; undergraduate and graduate) and the newness of the program required leadership and staff to confront and overcome a variety of obstacles. Within the first four years, five scholars left the program, ten are finishing teacher education requirements, and four have graduated and are teaching in schools serving Tribal communities.

The program also critically drew from lessons learned in other Indigenous teacher education programs to guide its approach to culturally responsive teaching as fundamental for Indigenous well-being, such as a cohort model and specialized courses to address critical Indigenous education. It also provided specialized advising services to supplement existing campus services, partnerships with Tribal departments of education and schools serving Tribal communities, and a focus on self-determination and Indigenous knowledge systems (Jones Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Castagno, 2012; Carpluk & Leonard, 2017; Castagno et al., 2015). Aware “that good intentions and isolated strategic efforts are simply not enough to overcome entrenched patterns of assimilation and colonization” (Castagno, 2012, p. 16), IKEEP aimed to center teacher education discourse around a both/and model, where Indigenous teachers are supported to become knowledgeable about, and comfortable with, *both* mainstream educational theories/content *and* Indigenous theories/content to design and facilitate learning pedagogies which sustain and revitalize Indigenous ways of knowing among Indigenous youth (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Lee, 2015; McCarty & Lee, 2014). With no Indigenous faculty and few certified Indigenous practitioners and school leaders, IKEEP also created a regional Indigenous teacher mentor network to support IKEEP scholars during and after degree completion. Seven Indigenous teacher mentors were selected based on their commitment to culturally responsive pedagogies, respect for Indigenous knowledge systems in schooling, and experience teaching in K-12 settings with high populations of Indigenous youth. Coming from a diversity of regions (Wyoming, Washington, New Mexico, Idaho, and Nevada), school contexts (BIE/public), and

content areas (elementary, secondary, principal, special education, etc.), the Indigenous teacher mentors network supports IKEEP scholars as a collective during group retreats and as individuals, through distance relationships and one-on-one visits, during preservice education and in-service teaching.

After reflecting on the process of developing culturally responsive pedagogies to serve Indigenous youth in a predominately white institution where few faculty and staff had knowledge of Indigenous content, culture, or pedagogies, and no Indigenous faculty in the teacher education program, we decided to examine the experiences of those who participate in the life of IKEEP to better understand the ecology of interactions and infrastructure required to bring it to fruition. The program's vision proposed an ambitious new paradigm. Although we have cultivated many opportunities to help IKEEP to flourish, the program continues to face considerable obstacles to its systemic well-being. Study of the critical moves that have supported the constitution of this new space in teacher education offers opportunity to highlight how nation building orientations represent a healthy paradigm shift in teacher education, one that enables teacher education programs to honor Indigenous students and their communities in both immediate and long-term ways.

Methodologies/Methods

Critical cultural theorists ask scholars to acknowledge that one's social positioning—race, class, gender, and any other divisions of social inequities—impacts our perspectives and relationships in research (Milner, 2008), and to be critically reflective of researcher voice in ways that counter the historical subjugation of Indigenous and communities of color in research (Anthony-Stevens, 2017; Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Jacobs-Huey, 2002). Neither Vanessa nor Julia identify as Indigenous. Yolanda is Indigenous, a member of the Nez Perce Tribe, and lives and works on her ancestral homelands in Idaho. To support Tribal nation building through our work and research, we draw upon Indigenous and decolonizing research methodologies (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012) to center relationships, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in our interactions with IKEEP. For Vanessa, a white educational researcher in Indigenous education, much of this research occurred while she worked daily with IKEEP as PI and Director of the program. With three decades of work advocating for underserved and Indigenous youth at the institution coordinating programs such as Upward Bound and the College Assistance Migrant Program, Yolanda brought her role as Executive Director of Tribal Relations to support widespread institutional advocacy for the establishment of IKEEP. Julia, a Lebanese national and researcher in educational leadership, brought an outside eye as a learner and advocate in support of educational transformation at the institution. Collectively, we approached this research with a shared sense of accountability to Indigenous agendas of social change in higher education.

Data Collection

The data used in this article is part of a longitudinal study of the development of Indigenous teacher education programs to serve predominantly rural, high need regions. With Institutional Review Board approval for ethnographic and autoethnographic documentation of IKEEP, Vanessa began documenting the evolution of IKEEP in 2017 and invited IKEEP scholars to document their own trajectories of learning, through self-study and in-depth interviews. Three scholars from the first IKEEP cohort consented to participate during their preservice teacher education. In 2019, with the inception of the second IKEEP cohort, the Institutional Review Board was amended to include participation of new IKEEP scholars and in-depth interviews with key IKEEP collaborators, such as Indigenous teacher mentors and tribal education partners. All interviews were conducted with participant consent, transcripts, and raw audio files were shared with participants after each in-depth interview. Anchoring our research in the 4 R's—respect, relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility—of critical Indigenous research methodologies (Brayboy et al., 2012) meant that we practiced a level of accountability beyond the academic exercise of research, maintaining an understanding that the outcome and process of research “continues to shape the way Indigenous communities are seen, heard, and felt for generations past, present, and future” (Benally et al., 2020, p. 156), and as such have a responsibility to report on the struggles of institutional change with theoretical frameworks that center Indigenous community’s goals of self-determination and nation building into the future. All participants were invited to review and provide feedback on a draft of this article prior to its submission for final editorial review.

Data Analysis

The specific data used in our analysis is drawn from the following sources: (a) fieldnotes of program activities including scholars and mentors (2017–2020); (b) autoethnographic audio journals recorded by Vanessa (2017–2019); (c) five semistructured, open-ended interviews with scholars who graduated in the first cohort, and (d) six semistructured, open-ended interviews with Indigenous teacher mentors. We used an open coding method (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) for review of audio journals, fieldnotes, and in-depth interview transcriptions to look for descriptive, substantive themes across the data as a whole. The theoretical lens of tribal nation building became more relevant as themes emerged across the data, in context and in relationship with each other (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). We then developed five main categories through the interplay of the contextualized review of data and the Tribal nation building framework: sovereignty and self-determination, education as service to community, relationship between community knowledge and academic knowledge, health and wellbeing of community over emphasis on individual achievement, and reciprocity to community, people, and land. We saw these themes as interdependent

and helpful in understanding the experiences and perspectives of IKEEP leaders, mentors, and students. We chose to organize the findings into categories based on participant categories—leadership, mentors, students—to illuminate the different ways participants performed, expressed, and embodied in nation building as educators and leaders.

There are, of course, limitations to this research. Like any knowledge production process, ours is situated in a specific social–historical context that is unique and cannot be generalized to all Indigenous education programs, nor representative of the vast diversity of Indigenous peoples and perspectives in such programs. Our data set does not include all IKEEP students; hence our study only reports on part of the IKEEP effort. While we do not approach theory as objectively decontextualized from the situated and subjective human experiences from which it is drawn (Blodgett et al., 2011), we did take steps to ensure trustworthiness and transferability of data, including triangulation and member checking. This research provides insight into the details of educational leadership and community building that create and expand space for Indigenous self-determination in PWIs.

Findings

Nation Building Orientation in Administration: Attending to University Capacity Building

Constructing an operational space for nation building required the strategic leadership of program PI (Vanessa) and co-PI (Yolanda)—and an ability to leverage our positions on campus and in region conversations of Tribal–university education partnerships. Both Vanessa and Yolanda recognized that balanced attention to addressing the issues identified by Tribal communities and “attempting to change the way the institution serves Indigenous students” (Brayboy et al., 2014, p. 585) would both be required if IKEEP was to be successful. Vanessa and Yolanda frequently discussed this as a combination of “baby steps” in a vision of a “long game.”

At the university level, Yolanda’s role as Director of Tribal Relations in the President’s cabinet and the established memorandum of understanding with 10 regional Tribal governments (five of which are in Idaho), provided infrastructure and relationships that support and seek regular input from regional Tribal education advisory boards. Within year one of IKEEP, we assembled a program advisory board consisting of neighboring Tribal directors of education, state level coordinators of Indian education, and Tribal members who serve in various capacities in regional higher education. This group was assembled specifically to hold IKEEP accountable to the interests of Native peoples and Tribal communities. Vanessa’s role as teacher education faculty also helped to identify key educational leaders from school districts serving Tribal communities and teacher education faculty to support the mission of the program, all of whom were non-Indigenous. Attention to the balance of Tribal representatives and higher Ed/K-12 representatives, including balance between

Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices, were central considerations for rooting support for IKEEP.

Both Vanessa and Yolanda believed that shifting how the institution serves Indigenous students and communities needed to be nested in broader campus conversations if IKEEP was to become a long-term program able to honor the desires of tribal communities. Among other efforts, Yolanda's office organized and hosted a Tribal Summit on Education in fall 2017 with strategic emphasis on building capacity for IKEEP. The summit, the second in a bi-annual tradition, brought together Tribal leaders, Indigenous students, university administration, faculty, and staff, and regional teachers and school leaders. It featured sessions by Tribal leaders and Native American student services, and centered the voices of Indigenous students, including a panel led by the first cohort of IKEEP scholars. These leadership moves cultivated space for Tribal members to voice their perspectives and concerns in education to a predominantly non-Indigenous university audience with much to learn about Tribal sovereignty.

Attending to Tribal nation building through teacher education program(s) also required strategic approaches. Because we acutely recognized the teacher education curriculum was not prepared to engage Tribal sovereignty, we incorporated required courses and professional development classes to establish and nurture a shared dialog about Tribal educational sovereignty among IKEEP scholars. Vanessa began each cohort with required intensive summer sessions that either brought in visiting Indigenous scholar-educators and/or took IKEEP scholars to learning institutes led by Indigenous educators. These programmatic moves supported scholars to study with Indigenous academics, interact with Indigenous community leaders in their homelands, and centered Indigenous knowledge systems in K-12 curriculum. Cohort 1, for example, experienced two-day and one-night camping with tribal member ethnographers, Indigenous language teachers, and political leaders; and walked students through Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) ways of knowing in relationship with land as a means for exploring with teachers how Indigenous knowledge and academic knowledge can be blended through curriculum and pedagogy, in service of community goals. While these sessions frequently occurred outside of the mainstream teacher education curriculum and were not required of all teacher education students, they offered a structure to prioritize professional development led by Tribal leaders and Indigenous scholars/practitioners and subsequently a blueprint to leverage these positive experiences to impact mainstream curriculum substitutions and course changes.

Lastly, creating collaborative and relevant teacher preparation experiences for Indigenous teachers in a program struggling to support even foundational culturally responsive orientations (Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020) required Vanessa to seek out regular opportunities to broadly disseminate IKEEP's vision and needs in the college. Audio diaries recorded by Vanessa during the first 18 months of the program described the acute daily barriers to "building a space that doesn't exist yet," and the struggles to establish a conversant level of respect for Tribal sovereignty and the

unique responsibility the land grant institution had to learn with an Indigenous teacher cohort. Vanessa's approach was to model and repeat nation building language in program and college meetings so as to center tribes as the arbiters of knowledge regarding the needs of Indigenous schools, not that of the state or noncommunity member teachers. Modeling nation building language involved sometimes small shifts, such as referring to Tribes as nations or elevating attention to sovereignty and federal Indian law in the context of K-12 education. It also involved relational shifts such as emphasizing educational partnership with tribal agencies of education, rather than solely relying on individuals employed by public schools that serve tribal citizens (individuals who are frequently non-Indigenous).

Vanessa also had to learn to embrace opportunities for "reporting out" to college administration, even when there was little understanding of tribal sovereignty or material support for IKEEP. Vanessa recalls navigating multiple meetings with administrators where she highlighted IKEEP as a significant opportunity to expand the institution's knowledge for supporting cultural and linguistic diversity in teacher preparation and requested programmatic and all college professional development to help faculty and staff understand critical issues in Indigenous education. On multiple occasions, she was met with comments such as, "well, everybody's got their 'thing' or agenda. I don't know how we can make everyone attend this kind of professional development" (Audio journal, April 2017). While such responses from institutional leaders are unacceptable and do not support Tribal nation building, particularly at a land grant institution, they reflect common characterizations of Indigenous student needs as "asterisk," an aside to discussions of educational practices and priorities (Shotton et al., 2013). The strategic persistence of IKEEP leadership to re-frame the program as a responsibility of the institutions mission required Vanessa and Yolanda to lean into institutional resistance as spaces of opportunity. Navigating resistance on the local level made apparent that to support nation building in teacher education, faculty needed to be educated and brought along with the work of the program. We were not (yet) in a position to require such participation. However, elevating the nation building conversation coincided with university level review of strategic initiatives for diversity and inclusion review and the college of education's professional program accreditation review, which both presented opportunity for college level and university leadership to echo the language of IKEEP leaders, thereby constituting its existence and making it harder not to acknowledge its importance to the college or the university.

Nation Building Orientation in Mentorship: Grounding Support Systems with Indigenous Teachers

On the last three-day Mentorship Summit, an IKEEP mentor teacher shared her satisfaction with the interactions between student and mentors, Tribal leaders and teachers, by stating,

...such support systems like [IKEEP] have been established, but they come and go. What we need is to ground this type of structure support [...] It can happen anywhere in the US and the structure that I've seen evolve from IKEEP, it just makes a whole lot

of sense. And you know, I'll go back and share with my community. I know we've done our part to establish this type of support and growth.

The words of this teacher mentor, a veteran teacher and respected elder from a southwestern Tribal community, highlighted the deeply rooted "sense of reciprocity rooted in relationships and responsibilities that suggests individuals serve their nation and communities while being supported by that same nation and its communities" (Brayboy et al., 2014, p. 587). The assembled network of Indigenous mentorship, through practitioner support and Tribal leadership, is a salient source of IKEEP's ability to support the health and wellbeing of communities, which is central to self-determination, above institutional or funding agency agendas such as focus on individual credentials and number of students graduated, as seen in the words of IKEEP teacher mentors.

The program's prioritization of Indigenous and tribal nations' perspectives in professional development and workshops reflects these rooted relationships. However, that is not to say that relationships eliminated the restrictive burdens of state-federal standardized requirements for teacher and school accountability. Many IKEEP mentors talked about their desire to serve as a mentor to new Indigenous teachers to help them learn to "navigate the politics," as they themselves did not feel mainstream teacher education prepared them for the pervasiveness of institutionalized racism in public schools (Sabzalian, 2019) and the "double bind" of being recruited to be culturally responsive teachers of Native youth, but devalued them in favor of one-size-fits-all, standardized western approaches to teaching (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012). Centering the wellbeing of community, over the standardized, Eurocentric goals of mainstream education was presented as not only a mechanism of mental health and service to other, but also one of long-term survival and survivance—a conceptual tool to be leveraged as strength in the conflictive and paradoxical realities of contemporary schooling.

IKEEP's Indigenous teacher mentor network took nearly two years to establish. Since established in 2018, it has served as a generative space for Indigenous teachers to discuss the issues of longer term community histories and desires ignored by mainstream teacher education. Indigenous teachers frequently serve in institutions dominated by Eurocentric perspectives. Both IKEEP scholars and mentors refer to collaborations and annual Mentor Summits as spaces to "ignit[e] that flame again" and cultivate a community of practice among Indigenous teachers that shares a fortitude and development of complex skills required to adapt to the dynamic and changing needs of Native nations. In the words of a teacher mentor and tribal school principal, "...[we do] get really bogged down in big systems or little systems," that promote standardized education systems, which "really chews up new teachers and then spits out like this clone copy." Because nation building orientations are frequently marginalized in these intuitions, the voices of Indigenous mentors were significant to honoring relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility in ways IKEEP scholars desired to approach their beliefs and values for teaching. We observed the teacher mentor

network enabled conversations that highlight attention to community wellbeing needed to manage the strain of wearing multiple and contradictory hats as teachers, and the importance of spaces to kindle the self-determination orientation through teaching.

The wisdom of teacher mentors brought a conscious attention to the change needed for reconceptualizing relationships between teachers, community, and healthy nations. As one teacher mentor shared in an interview, Indigenous teachers are bridges between Tribal communities and schools in ways that honor Tribal histories and support intergeneration growth beyond single classrooms or standardized achievement measures. Enacting of these roles must be responsive to local community epistemology, ontology, and axiology and rooted in local place.

...when I was a girl here, I was growing up I was taught that, um, you need to look ahead of you to see what [the elders] see, because older people see things that kids don't. They know when things are coming, they know the impacts of things [...] I have to look to those older people to know what you need to be prepared for...I don't necessarily know if our students get taught that anymore, but our tribal council has been chosen by our people to be those focal points and to be those leaders [...]So, [as a school leader] that's my personal belief of why I really value our tribal council's thoughts [...] our community needs more engineers or we need some people in fisheries or, um, salmon is coming back to our rivers and we don't want the knowledge to go outside of our tribe we want the knowledge to, you know, to come from within.

The reflection of this mentor teacher centers Tribal communities as guides for education. Shared through her mentorship, articulations like this ground new Indigenous teachers firmly in Indigenous ways of doing, rather than only emphasizing state standards and new-fangled teaching methods.

Nation Building Orientation Among Students: Sustaining and Revitalizing Youth-Teacher-Community Relationships

IKEEP students articulated their experience with the program as “bigger than any one person” (Brayboy et al., 2014, p. 584) and situated in their goals to serve family and community wellbeing. Scholars' desires to teach in their home communities frequently aligned with a desire to reclaim and recreate a healthy respect of Indigenous youth through strength-based pedagogies. When asked to articulate their motivations to take on positions as teachers their articulations were often guided by a responsibility to the next generation of learners. Statements such as, “I want to be a positive Native role model for Native students in schools,” “I want to support students to see their strengths as native people,” and “I am passionate about interrupting systemic racism and violence in my community,” intertwined with ways scholars individually and collectively saw themselves as change agents, addressing voids unaddressed in their schooling experiences and pushing back against the assimilative approaches to education not responsive to the cultural traditions of Indigenous students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Their very being in teacher education was a way for them to model and guide the next generation of learners.

During IKEEP courses and workshop, students also expressed feeling nurtured to develop a language to articulate the significance of their community values for student wellbeing, and to identify systemic social inequalities that have systematically attempted to segregate and marginalize Native peoples (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). A recent graduate described it this way, when reflecting on an early course taught by an Indigenous scholar:

I heard educational inequalities and social injustices and I'm like, 'oh my gosh!' This is why I am the way I am! This is why I'm here, this is like, this is why education has failed so many of us as native people and native students.

Support for IKEEP students to decode the intricate web of cultures of power in society and schools helped scholars focus attention on sustaining community, rather than just individual wellbeing (Haynes Writer & Oesterreich, 2011). Critical consciousness through course work and modeling by Indigenous faculty members who would "just name it" also supported IKEEP students to acknowledge hegemony and gain tools to confront the asymmetrical power dynamics prevalent in schools across Indian Country.

The concept of sustaining community within classrooms stood out in the ways recent IKEEP graduates highlighted the importance of relationality to place, Indigenous knowledge, and models of other Indigenous educators for knowing how to make of space for the wellbeing of Indigenous students in their classrooms. IKEEP scholars finishing their student teaching internships or first year of classroom teaching described the modeling provided through IKEEP courses and mentors as significant for helping them to envision how they could *enact* culturally responsive teaching for Indigenous youth. Stepping into the classroom with a new paradigm, such as a belief in "using the environment to help students process information" and advocating for "teaching in a way that Native students have grown up seeing the world" were ways IKEEP scholars described operationalizing their commitment to education as more than the four walls.

Relationships with veteran Indigenous teachers and tribal leaders grounded scholars' thinking about the intricacies of culturally responsive, community principles. One recent IKEEP graduate (who has accepted a fulltime teaching job on a reservation in rural Nevada) described ah-ha moments in his IKEEP coursework where he observed Nez Perce culture and language experts model ways of teaching in relationship to the land. Two years later, this moment still stood out to him as one of the first times he felt encouraged to blend community knowledge and knowledge gained from intuitions, such as state standards. We call this "rubber hits the road moments," when scholars highlighted how they began to see ways to use community protocols to transfer knowledge in respectful ways with their students. Another recent IKEEP graduate who currently teaches in her home community in rural Idaho highlighted the strength of IKEEP professional development that centered on strengthening relationship between classrooms and community values. It helped her continue to "ask things of my community and just remember protocol and procedure"

as grounding for the design and implementation of her art curriculum. These relationships were also conceptualized with respect for intergenerational learning. "... Everybody's grandmother was one of their biggest teachers"—described one scholar in the second cohort as evidence of her remembering that grandparents should play a meaningful role in K-12 classroom learning, as students and grandparents benefit each other. Visions of healthy relationships and communities were consistently associated with the ways IKEEP scholars maintained or revitalized their commitments to serve Indigenous people while part of the program. These examples are counternarratives to transactional pipeline models in teacher education and offer a vision of community-oriented teacher education that operates on intergenerational timescales and roots itself in broader community epistemologies, place, and contexts specific senses of wellbeing.

Discussion

Brayboy et al. (2014) write, "If nation building is, in part, seen as a way to meet the needs of tribal nations, then it must necessarily take a long-term view to consider the ways education can be engaged from both bottom-up and top-down to better serve Native students and their communities" (p. 580). The well-documented need to prepare Indigenous college graduates to become teachers and serve the needs of Indigenous youth (Beaulieu, 2006; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Demmert, 2001; Tippeconnic, 2000) is one aspect of this long-term effort. Findings from the IKEEP effort demonstrate how strategic shifts in leadership and programming can impact a conceptual flip, whereby a shared institutional space can be cultivated to prioritize self-determination and tribal sovereignty over mainstream assimilationist approaches in education, or even generalized approaches to multiculturalism. Even when these spaces are emergent, intentional investment in nurturing networks of Indigenous mentor teachers and tribal community collaborators are seen to be transformative for new Indigenous teachers in the process of mapping their own place in service of Tribal communities. IKEEP students' perceptions of effective teaching for their Indigenous students embrace the nation building tenet of blending community knowledge and knowledge gained from the institution, the both/and approach (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). This serves as a counter to the deficit-oriented notions many teachers and educational leaders still hold which continue to believe that educational strategies that integrate culture are inferior and remedial in nature (Klug & Whitefield, 2003). Ample research reports that there is need to support new Indigenous educators to transfer theories of culturally responsive schooling into local contexts of classroom practice (Castagno et al., 2015). Evidence from our findings give us significant hope in that the early career socialization to both/and pedagogies and the support network of master Indigenous teachers who share similar perspectives may contribute to more robust implementational spaces. Indigenous teachers committed to culturally responsive

schooling leave teacher education and are hired into rural, high-need schools with few Indigenous colleagues, and even fewer models of culturally responsive schooling reflective of the local context and culture. This early socialization and grounding could help them navigate the constraints of systems not yet ready to support such changes (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012).

The roles of IKEEP PIs, Vanessa and Yolanda, also draw attention to the importance of maintaining spaces in higher education for on-going interactions with Native peoples, schools, and communities (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015) and a strategic attention to collaborative alliances, such as brokering and power sharing, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to center tribal sovereignty in education (Anthony-Stevens, 2017). Further, the leadership brought to IKEEP by the Indigenous mentor teachers rooted understanding that the institution needs to develop a shared agenda for addressing the lack of Indigenous teachers in conjunction with its tribal partners (Brayboy et al., 2014). The space for Indigenous mentor teachers who are experienced individuals with deep commitments to serving their people should also been seen as a transformative type of leadership. Not only does this style of mentorship fill a void in Indigenous teacher education, but it also contributes to a shared sense of community in rural geographies where Indigenous educators can frequently be among the only Native teachers in their work sites.

Finally, the ways in which the IKEEP community embraced and voiced nation building orientations in pedagogy, partnership, and the role of schools in community wellbeing, reflects a shared belief that it *is* at least purposeful to create shared visions about the transformation of education programs serving Indigenous youth. Participants are hopeful, but they also appear cognoscente that serving the desires and interests of Tribal communities through schools is, and will continue to be, a deeply challenging struggle. In that regard, our choice to focus on the promising aspects of the program to create space for nation building orientations in education does not disregard the daily resistance IKEEP students, teacher mentors and program administrators face in their efforts to recognize and nurture the needs of Indigenous peoples and their communities. To date, IKEEP has no internal material support from the institution for its effort and has not (yet) been able to alter required coursework in mainstream teacher education. Further, no effort has been made to recruit and retain a fulltime Indigenous faculty member to work with program.

In highlighting the on-the-ground struggle of IKEEP, we honor the context specific nature of our work in unique relationships with local histories, lands, and cultural practices. We also elevate the unifying elements of Tribal nation building in higher education as a way to contribute to collective struggles across the US and the globe. As other scholars Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2013, p. 485) have noted, “Indigenous peoples have much to learn from each other regarding our efforts to mobilize to effectively change the educational system from one of acculturation, assimilation, isolation, and colonization to one that embraces the cultural and linguistic diversity of Indigenous students, their families, and communities.”

Conclusion

The development of community-based Indigenous educators to serve Indigenous youth is paramount for helping Tribal nation and their citizens to build both a strong present and future. The complexities of policy, poverty, historical racism, and distrust between tribal communities and schools require greater attention in teacher education to strategic and intentional local processes and partnerships beyond the academy, understood in holistic, rather than nonlinear terms. Approaching Indigenous teacher education programming as Tribal nation building entails a process counter to the dominant emphasis on input–output logic models (degree/certification), and instead a foundational commitment to understand and embrace tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

Like many Indigenous teacher education students, IKEEP participants navigate multiple forms of cultural and epistemological border crossing, material and intellectual, to become conversant in academic spaces dominated by imported European theories of being and learning, as well as to maintain or revitalize their own knowledge of Indigenous social and cultural ecologies. Orientations to Tribal nation building brings relevance and strength to support that these treacherous navigations are meaningful to students beyond themselves.

We conclude that visioning with Indigenous teachers, and extended networks of tribally invested collaborators, is part of broader intergenerational processes of context-specific capacity building and strengthening of a nation that benefits from multiple types and levels of leadership. It is important to re-emphasize strategic persistence and focus on long-term efforts of Tribal nation building as a long-term framework that can guide institutional leaders to hold space for Indigenous teachers to bring “their whole selves to their classrooms, relearning their language, and knowing and living cultural traditions, knowledge, and stories” (Yazzie-Mintz, 2008, p. 91), even in spaces that have been historically hostile to Indigenous community well-being.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all IKEEP scholars and mentors who collaborated in this research. We thank Philip Stevens and Stacy Boe Miller for reviewing drafts of this article. We recognize that our institution was made possible through the unfair seizure of Nez Perce, Coeur d’Alene, and Shoshone-Bannock lands during the Morrill Act. The institution has never equitably compensated the tribes for their land, a reality we find unacceptable and central to the impetus of this present research.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Julia Mahfouz is an assistant professor in the Educational Leadership program. Her research agenda has been shaped by more than 10 years of educational work as an international educator in the capacity of high school teacher, principal (K-12), and curriculum coordinator. Mahfouz's research interests include exploring the social and emotional dynamics of educational settings and their effect on school climate. She has examined the influence of mindfulness-based professional development program (CARE) on the well-being and leadership of school administrators. She is particularly focused on applying this research to improving principal preparation programs and enhancing the principals' social-emotional competencies and their capacity to cultivate a supportive learning environment.

Yolanda Bisbee is the Chief Diversity officer and executive director of Tribal Relations at the University of Idaho. As the executive director of Tribal Relations she is responsible for facilitating, planning and implementing open dialog between members of the Native American Tribes in the Northwest and members of the University of Idaho in order to best serve Tribal constituents, the University, states and regions.