Performing Decolonization

Lessons Learned from Indigenous Youth, Teachers and Leaders' Engagement with Critical Indigenous Pedagogy

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Introduction

MANY INDIGENOUS[1] CHILDREN and youth enter a schooling experience where they are forced to negotiate the ways in which their Indigenous values, knowledge and narratives can exist as they strive to adhere to academic expectations defined by Western values and knowledge systems. All encompassing are the contemporary experiences of living in an era of ongoing shifts shaped by a social, political and technological world which impacts how the youth will socially construct their understanding of what it means to be Indigenous. Inclusive within such a process involves the teachers and leaders who are charged with implementing and negotiating a curriculum and pedagogy that understands the intricacies of both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. However, too often schools continue to limit the ways in which Indigenous systems of knowing can be drawn upon to inform how educators will guide Indigenous students toward understanding, protecting and utilizing their Indigenous knowledge systems.

We propose it is vital that educators and educational leaders engage Indigenous students in a decolonizing process of praxis, dialogue and self-reflection to sustain and privilege Indigenous knowledge systems while simultaneously addressing contemporary goals and issues within the schooling context. By engaging in such processes, educators and students can find ways to address various issues specific to their community needs and aspirations within educational settings. In this article, we are calling for educators to employ such processes that ignite a critical consciousness around the ways in which Indigenous knowledge systems exist, or do not exist, in the schooling contexts and what these processes suggest for social justice pedagogy serving Indigenous students and communities.

By drawing upon our own critical Indigenous qualitative research (CIQR) studies (Garcia, 2011; Shirley, 2011), we engaged in a "cross dialogue" and offer an examination about how our participants from our separate research projects responded to the process of decolonization and critical Indigenous pedagogy. As co-authors who are Indigenous, we understand that the relationship we have is defined by having connections to similar environmental, ecological and spiritual landscapes of our tribal communities of the Hopi/Tewa[2] and Diné[3] Nations located in the northeastern regions of Arizona. As a result, during our dialogues about our research studies conducted in our respective communities, we identified similarities and differences with regard to moments of tension as well as the nuances and possibilities our research studies suggest for Indigenous education. We examine how our participants responded to the process of decolonization and how their experiences transpired into social change, empowerment and transformation for themselves and their communities.

In what follows, we provide insight on the context of Indigenous education with the inclusion of contemporary issues facing the Hopi/Tewa and Diné communities. The purpose of including the current issues is to exemplify contested spaces where epistemological and ontological differences determine the relationship with sacred landscapes. In particular, just as Indigenous peoples continue to survive based on the knowledge associated with sacred sites and landscapes, we suggest schools be considered a *sacred landscape*—a sacred space of engagement—where the ways we interact with curriculum and pedagogy is shaped by Indigenous knowledge systems. Thereafter, we provide a discussion on the theoretical framework—critical Indigenous pedagogy—followed by an introduction to our critical Indigenous qualitative research studies. Following this context, we discuss the ways in which our participants developed and enacted a critical Indigenous consciousness (Lee, 2006) in response to examining the history of colonization and assimilation; deconstructing power and knowledge; and reclaiming Indigenous Hopi/Tewa and Diné knowledge. We end with advocating the significance of *schools as sacred landscapes* by reinforcing critical Indigenous pedagogy based on the common themes (re)generated from our research studies.

Schools as Sacred Landscapes: Indigenous Education

> Before Hopis attended U. S. government schools, used lead pencils, or sat at wooden desks, Hopi children received education on the mesas, in the fields, and within the walls of their stone homes. (Sakiestewa Gilbert, 2010, p. 95)

History tells us that the evolution of Native American education is framed within colonial experiences of Western schooling structures, values, and knowledge systems. Yet as we find within the words of Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, in regard to the Hopi people, before Western society defined what "education" and "knowledge" would be for our youth, Indigenous peoples had (and continue to have) a cultural literacy that was (and is) transmitted through the songs, ceremonies, stories and spiritual landscapes that define our existence. Included within this form of schooling "on the mesa and in the fields" were complex and rigorous forms of accountability that shaped and defined our perceptions and relationships to the world.

Unfortunately, the Western process of learning has limited, altered and excluded the history, language and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples (Adams, 1995; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). In today's context, Indigenous education is about creating a schooling

experience that is blended, balanced and inclusive of both Western and Indigenous values and knowledge systems. The goal for Indigenous education is to enact a schooling experience that is rooted in self-education, self-determination and sovereignty for Indigenous peoples. This suggests that schools serving Indigenous children and youth begin to problematize the ways in which curriculum and pedagogy can become a *blending* of landscapes between our schools and communities.

Essential to understanding the nuances of choices that inform how Indigenous peoples are internalizing their world, various Indigenous scholars (Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Benham, 2008; Grande, 2004; Metallic & Seiler, 2009) suggest that a process of decolonization must be enacted in order to activate the process of including Indigenous knowledge into Western schooling structures so that the balance between knowledge systems can be achieved. This process requires us "to reawaken to the origins of our place (physical place, metaphysical place, spiritual place) and learn to live-into this truth" (Benham, 2008, p. 10). Within the decolonization experience, the "reawakening of the origins of our place" suggests that we become conscious about how our ontologies are shaped and re-shaped by our ancestral landscapes. These landscapes, unfortunately, are consistently under subjugation which implies our knowledge systems are vulnerable to destruction. In honor of understanding the urgency of sustaining Indigenous knowledge systems, we share two contemporary issues regarding ancestral landscapes our communities (the Hopi/Tewa and Diné) have faced and endured. The goal for sharing these issues is to exemplify the nuances and complexities of protecting spiritual landscapes and natural resources that sustain our Indigenous knowledge and value systems. As a result, Indigenous peoples have firm responsibilities for developing a critical consciousness about the choices we make regarding our "origins of place."

As readers, we ask that you consider the ways in which Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge inform the responses to the following issues facing the Indigenous communities. How might the current issues inform a social justice oriented curriculum and pedagogy for Indigenous peoples? What are the pedagogical possibilities of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge associated with sacred sites through a critical analysis of the current issues?

Sacred Sites: *Dook'o'ooslíid* and *Nuvatukyaovi*

Dook'o'ooslíid (Diné) and *Nuvatukyaovi* (Hopi) are the names for the San Francisco Peaks located in Flagstaff, Arizona and are considered to be sacred and spiritual landscapes. For the Diné, *Dook'o'ooslíid* is home to their *diyin dine'é* (Holy People[4]) and is considered 1 of 4 sacred mountains. For the Hopi/Tewa people, it is home to their *katsinas*[5]. Both the *diyin dine'é* and the *katsinas* are considered to be spiritual beings and messengers for the respective tribes. *Dook'o'ooslíid* and *Nuvatukyaovi* are also considered sacred for other Indigenous tribal communities in the region in their own specific beliefs and purposes. To the general public, the San Francisco Peaks is considered a public ski resort known as Snowbowl.

In 2002, tensions and conflict emerged within this sacred site as Snowbowl proposed the use of spraying artificially made snow produced from reclaimed sewage water on *Dook'o'ooslíid* and *Nuvatukyaovi.* The purpose of using the artificial snow was to extend the pleasures of the skiing season while increasing Snowbowl's corporate and economic revenue. The Indigenous peoples associated with the mountain demonstrated firm opposition to the environmental and spiritual exploitation of their sacred site. In addition, Snowbowl proposed to expand the ski

resort, which eliminates access to scared sites, herbs and medicine used by local Indigenous peoples. Former Diné President Joe Shirley reflected on the issue:

> The San Francisco Peaks is the essence of who we are. It is a Holy place of worship that was placed in the West for our sacred prayers and worship. It is. . . the Holy house of our sacred deities whom we pray to and give our offerings.. . . It is also a place where we gather and collect our sacred herbs for healing and our way of life ceremonies yearlong…. The United States of America will commit genocide by allowing the desecration of the essence of our way of life. (cited in Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010, p. 21)

The Hopi/Tewa and Diné Tribes, among others throughout the state of Arizona, have worked to challenge this proposal (Forgotten People, 2011; Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, 2011). The resistance to Snowbowl's proposal was framed within the context of Indigenous epistemology and ontology; however after several court appearances and decisions, the courts approved the use of reclaimed sewer water for producing artificial snow (Holder, 2011). This court decision proved that Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies continue to be considered non-existent and irrelevant while corporate and economic gains and interests are privileged. The next case exemplifies further attacks on Diné and Hopi/Tewa rights to ecological and environmental resources.

"Water is Life": Proposed Water Settlement

Amid the writing process for this article, we were informed by our families, friends and concerned allies for Indigenous rights, that once again new developments regarding access to water rights on the Hopi/Tewa and Diné Tribal lands were underway. Introduced by US Senator Jon Kyl, Arizona Senate Bill 2109 *Navajo-Hopi Little Colorado River Water Rights Settlement Act* (Tauberer, 2004), received resistance from the Hopi and Diné Tribal members. Some Diné and Hopi people who resist this bill suggest that it would allow continued access and exploitation of their water resources by corporate entities. In a letter opposing the bill, several former Diné and Hopi Tribal leaders replied:

> We do agree that "it is time to set the record straight." S.2109 is not a water rights settlement act. It is a license to continue the exploitation of our precious natural resources while threatening our tribal sovereignty. S.2109 is very dangerous for the Navajo and Hopi tribal nations and is not acceptable to members of our respective tribes….Water is life. Water is sacred; it is central to our way of life, to our ceremonies and traditions. We must protect and preserve it for our future generations. (cited in Beyond the Mesas, 2012)

Evident within the outcry from local Hopi and Diné opposition to the bill is a direct concern for the protection and sustainability of their environmental and ecological resources; upon deeper examination, however, the resistance is framed within the right to autonomy, self-determination and sovereignty that is rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems. The final comments within the letter make direct correlations to the relationship that both Indigenous communities have to water and how the relationships associated with the preservation of cultural ceremonies and a way of life are *defined by water*.

Within these brief acknowledgements of current issues facing our Indigenous communities, we observe that the transmission of Indigenous knowledge becomes central to understanding the complexities of how such spiritual landscapes are *the sources of knowledge* that inform how our youth—our next generations—will continue to survive. For the Hopi/Tewa and Diné people (and other Indigenous peoples affected by the issues above), the next generation of youth will need opportunities to not only learn about the significance of certain spiritual landscapes, but should be provided with spaces of engagement that offer dialectical and self-reflexive opportunities to unpack the ways in which Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are contested and most importantly, how they are negotiated by Indigenous leaders and community members.

For Indigenous peoples, education is not simply about the process of acquiring Western knowledge within the walls of schooling structures. Rather, we suggest Indigenous schools be encouraged to reconsider themselves as a *sacred landscape* where Indigenous knowledge is recognized and offers a re-newed beginning for revitalizing Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in contemporary contexts. When Indigenous schools consider themselves as sacred landscapes, it is anticipated that Indigenous knowledge would guide and define the ways in which we come to know ourselves and our communities among the intricacies of Western knowledge in schools.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Indigenous Pedagogy

Critical Indigenous pedagogy (CIP) is rooted in the discourse of critical pedagogy which is concerned with disrupting social injustices and transforming inequitable and oppressive power relations through a pedagogical process that empowers students and teachers to create social change in their communities (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003; Freire, 2002; Kincheloe, 2008). Notably, Paulo Freire's (2002) contribution to critical pedagogy is defined by the process of *praxis* and notions of *conscientization* that ignite a state of a critical consciousness that is self-liberating and transforms oppressive circumstances. Most essential Freire explains, "this discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis" (p. 65). Additionally, this process must be inclusive of a *dialectical* experience that offers opportunities for individuals and communities to engage in analyses, critiques and dialogues in order to recognize, unpack and resist notions of power and dominance.

Building on the framework of critical pedagogy, CIP is theoretically grounded in critical methods that resist the injustices caused by colonization and oppression experienced by Indigenous peoples. CIP utilizes pedagogical methods that are critical, self-reflexive, dialogical, decolonizing and transformative while valuing and relying on Indigenous knowledge systems to promote, protect and preserve Indigenous languages, cultures, land and people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008) suggest that:

> Critical Indigenous Pedagogy understands that all inquiry is both political and moral…It values the transformative power of indigenous, subjugated knowledges. It values the pedagogical practices that produce these knowledges (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 15) and it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering (p.2).

Fundamental to CIP is a strong commitment to serving and giving back to Indigenous communities that promote Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty in the educational context (Grande, 2004; Lee, 2006). Thus, with the omnipresent nature of Western society permeating Indigenous minds, communities and ways of life, enacting a critical consciousness through a decolonization process is an initial step in confronting cultural dominance and centering Indigenous ways of knowing. Lakota scholar Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (2004) provided a thorough and in-depth conceptualization of the process of decolonization:

> A large part of decolonization entails developing a critical consciousness about the cause(s) of our oppression, the distortion of history, our own collaboration, and the degrees to which we have internalized colonialist ideas and practices. Decolonization requires auto-criticism, self-reflection, and a rejection of victimage. Decolonization is about empowerment—a belief that situations can be transformed, a belief and trust in our own peoples' values and abilities, and a willingness to make change. It is about transforming negative reactionary energy into the more positive rebuilding energy needed in our communities. (Wheeler cited in Wilson, 2004, p. 71)

Decolonization incites the process of developing a *critical Indigenous consciousness* (Lee, 2006). Indigenous Diné scholar Tiffany Lee coined the term critical Indigenous consciousness to refer to Graham Hingangaroa Smith's (2003) conceptualization of consciencization, which is "'the freeing up of the Indigenous mind from the grip of dominant hegemony' (p. 2) in order to achieve transformation in Native communities" (cited in Lee, 2006, no page). Utilizing the theoretical framework of critical Indigenous pedagogy provides educators with pedagogical and analytical tools to engage students in a decolonization process that critically examines injustices and inequitable power relations while valuing, reclaiming and promoting Indigenous knowledge systems and sovereignty.

Methodology: Critical Indigenous Qualitative Research Studies

The idea of reciprocity (giving back) to our communities was the catalyst in which we conducted our research studies. This internal drive and motivation for wanting our research studies to benefit our communities compelled us to conduct our studies in respectful and ethical ways that supported our communities' educational goals and needs. Honoring our participants and tribal goals and needs situated our research agenda within consideration and accountability to our communities. With respect, reciprocity and accountability at the forefront of our thinking, we engaged in conducting critical Indigenous qualitative research studies that support the idea that research with Indigenous peoples must begin with Indigenous peoples' concerns and goals (Kovach, 2009). In addition, CIQR is research that is "always already political" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 2) and promotes the self-determination and sovereignty rights of Indigenous peoples; it is research that is decolonizing because it recognizes the ways in which Western science subjugated and marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems and thus works to legitimize Indigenous values, language and knowledge (Kovach, 2009; L. T. Smith, 1999; Swadener & Mutua, 2008); and it is research that promotes transformation within Indigenous communities (Grande, 2008; L. T. Smith, 1999).

By utilizing Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit; Brayboy, 2005) and Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2004) as theoretical orientations to guide our work, we each set up focus group discussions that promoted dialogue and self-reflexive practices to engage our research participants through the decolonization process. TribalCrit analyzes the ways in which colonialism is endemic in our Indigenous communities and thus calls for the use of ancient Indigenous and contemporary sources of knowledge to inform us about confronting issues of injustice within our Indigenous communities to achieve tribal self-determination and sovereignty (Brayboy, 2005). Red Pedagogy, a form of critical Indigenous pedagogy, provides an analytical and pedagogical lens for understanding and addressing how Indigenous educators might critically examine colonization, power, domination and inequities while promoting liberation, emancipation and empowerment (i.e., self-determination and sovereignty) in their classrooms, schools and communities (Grande, 2004). Within Red Pedagogy, critical dialogue is essential for developing a critical Indigenous consciousness around contemporary sociopolitical, economic, language, health and ecological issues affecting our communities (such as protecting spiritual landscapes which are often exploited for material gain as in the 2 issues facing the Hopi/Tewa and Diné) and promotes the educational process of reclaiming and privileging Indigenous knowledge systems in Western schooling structures (Grande, 2004, 2008).

The first CIQR study engaged Hopi/Tewa educators and educational leaders in the process of praxis and dialogue around their decisions regarding the curriculum and pedagogy selected for Hopi/Tewa students (Garcia, 2011). Specifically, the investigation exposed them to the theoretical frameworks of TribalCrit and Red Pedagogy and examined how the developing theoretical frameworks affected K-12 Hopi/Tewa teachers and principals and how the teachers and principals made curricular and pedagogical choices for Hopi/Tewa learners. The process of decolonization was activated through focus group sessions that centered on deconstructing the history of Native American education (specifically Hopi/Tewa education); examining the theoretical frameworks of TribalCrit and Red Pedagogy; exploring Indigenous knowledge within curriculum and pedagogy; analyzing Western curriculum materials and pedagogy; and discussing what self-education, self-determination and tribal sovereignty mean for Hopi/Tewa education.

By employing critical Indigenous pedagogical methods through the framework of TribalCrit, the second CIQR study engaged Diné youth (ages 11-14) in an examination of their identities/subjectivities (Shirley, 2011). A preliminary decolonization process was incited through focus group discussions that allowed for the Diné youth to engage in interactive dialogues and critical analyses of the history of colonization and assimilation in conjunction with Diné stories and philosophy. Through the focus group sessions, the youth self-reflected on their own identities, critiqued colonialism to expose the ways in which the presence of colonialism continued to exist among their people, and envisioned how they could actively engage in self-determination for themselves and their people. The topics within the focus group sessions centered on examining the history of the Diné long walks and boarding schools; critiquing the influences of popular culture and the media on Diné identities; and responding to and reflecting on Diné stories and philosophy in relation to their identities.

In what follows, we engage in dialogue to discuss the responses from our participants that capture the ways in which they interacted with the decolonization process, how the process facilitated the development and activation of a critical Indigenous consciousness and how they became empowered to promote self-determination for themselves and sovereignty for their communities.

Discussion: Cross-Cultural Contexts and Experiences with Decolonization

Four common and interrelated themes emerged from our two research studies that contextualize the ways in which a critical Indigenous consciousness developed within our participants through the decolonization process. Each of the themes are intricately connected to the process of becoming critically conscious of how colonialism continues to be endemic in Indigenous communities as well as the ways in which the process of reclaiming Indigenous Hopi/Tewa and Diné cultural knowledge emerged within our participants. The common themes below are organized around examining the history of colonization; recognizing the presence of hegemony through self-reflection; Indigenous knowledge; and hope, empowerment and transformation.

Examining the History of Colonization: "The Kids Need to Know"

History is all about power. The first task in decolonizing the mind is rediscovering history from an Indigenous perspective and developing a critical Indigenous consciousness of Indigenous peoples' history with colonization and assimilation. The critical dialogues that the participants in each study engaged in were designed to develop and raise their critical Indigenous consciousness and to motivate them to critically self-reflect on their roles as educators and on their identities (students and teachers) in relation to the history and contemporary circumstances. The students and teachers in both research studies reflected that the process of decolonization begins with understanding the history of colonization as one Hopi/Tewa educator commented:

> I think kids need to be told the truth. If they were told at an early age, they can be vocal about what their own beliefs are. Yeah, you do take that risk of teaching some of that [stories of colonization and oppression] that some may not agree with; however, I think we have been hiding for too long. The kids need to know.

In light of the notion that "the kids need to be told the truth" demonstrates that educators need to be prepared to implement a curriculum and pedagogy that works to develop a critical Indigenous consciousness in their students. By doing so, educators are preparing their Indigenous youth to be vocal about what their beliefs are—i.e., preparing Indigenous students to critically examine those injustices and to be aware of them so that they can be vocal, active and reflective about ways to counter inequality in their communities instead of passively accepting such circumstances. The following reflects the experiences of the Diné youth when they were provided with a curriculum that exposed them to critically examine the history of colonization and assimilation through the boarding school experiences from an Indigenous Diné perspective.

The youth deconstructed this boarding school history through the erase-replace policies and practices—"Erase Native languages; replace with English. Erase Native religions and replace with Christianity. And so on" (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. xxii). After exposing the Diné youth to the history of assimilation, they initially reacted and responded emotionally by expressing it was "sad, scary, horrible and hurtful." Further into the discussion, this reaction transitioned into an analytical reflection when the mission of "to kill the Indian and save the man" in boarding schools was introduced. The youth began critically reflecting on the effects that such assimilative policies and practices had on *their* identities as they made personal connections as to why they were not fluent in their language and why cultural and linguistic

declines were occurring with each generation among the Diné. One student analytically shared her grandmother's negative schooling experiences that innately affected the student's as well as her cousins' identities:

> And so now all of my cousins and all of us, we hardly know Navajo because of everything that happened to her back then. To this day I really don't know much. Nobody can really tell me Navajo stories. They [grandparents] lost it all after being at the boarding school.

Within this critical dialogue, other students reflected on how they as well as other Diné youth are generally affected by such historical educational experiences. By the end of the research study, some students articulated that they took action by asking their parents and grandparents to teach them the Diné language.

In response to the voices of Diné students' encounters with examining history, it is evident that "the kids [*do*] need to know." Although, the students first became emotional when they were told the "truth" (i.e., provided with the history from an Indigenous perspective) about the history of assimilation, they simultaneously became analytical when they began reflecting on their own identities. As a result, the youth became "vocal" about their situations by taking action to reclaim their Diné language. Finally by providing such a curriculum that the Diné youth were exposed to, Indigenous educators can begin to reestablish and reframe how they could privilege their Indigenous history, culture and language in the curriculum.

Recognizing the Presence of Hegemony Through Self-Reflection: "We Just Naturally Consent to It"

Because there is a certain degree "to which we have internalized colonialist ideas and practices" (Wheeler cited in Wilson, 2004, p. 71), a decolonizing process of self-reflecting is necessary to develop a critical Indigenous consciousness (Wane, 2009) as self-reflection deeply and self-consciously engages us in examining our innate thoughts, beliefs and actions. The self-reflexive processes the Hopi/Tewa educators and Diné youth engaged in lead to recognizing and examining the ways in which the participants realized they adopted and internalized Western ways; thus generating powerful points of negotiation, tension and epiphanies throughout the research process. For example, one Hopi/Tewa teacher reflected:

> For me, it was an eye-opener. My own upbringing was a lot in Western civilization and then working in my own community, [my teaching] was not necessarily based on cultural teaching. I found it was more in the Western teaching and…when I work with students, seeing that now their upbringing is more Westernized, they're losing *their* cultural identity.

These types of "eye-opening" experiences that stem from the self-reflexive process are required to develop a critical Indigenous consciousness. Another Hopi educator expressed her a-ha moment as a result of her self-reflexive process:

> We [educators] don't think about, "Wait what are we doing?" We just continue to accept this type of…hegemony. We just naturally consent to it….I know deep down inside me I say, "It's not going to work, it's false information…but we just accept the way things are.

> These things are regulations, procedures, policies that we have to follow—that they think is the best—so we follow along without even giving it a second thought that, "No, it's not going to work," but we accept it.

Similarly, when the Diné students were given the space to critically self-reflect on their identities, they also experienced a-ha moments as they recognized the degrees to which they unconsciously internalized Western knowledge and values. During an activity conducted to initiate the self-reflection process with the Diné youth, they were encouraged to examine their identities in relation to the level of influences they received from Western and Diné cultures (speaking English, watching television, attending church, speaking the Diné language, knowing Diné stories and attending Diné ceremonies). Once the analyses were completed, the youth were all overwhelmingly surprised with their findings and generally stated, "I didn't know I was more into the Western ways than the Navajo ways!" Upon this epiphany, they developed a feeling of uncertainty and disheartenment when they realized they were more Westernized in their identities than Diné. One student articulated his disbelief when he recognized that he marginalized his Diné identity and had unconsciously adopted hegemonic tendencies toward Western society and cultures. He stated:

> I knew a little bit about the Navajo but when I wrote it down, I didn't really know I was more into the Western than the Navajo because usually we're supposed to be more of the Navajo and not that much Western. But I…was more influenced by the Western way. It made me feel no good.

Through these examples, we find that both the students and teachers recognized the ways in which hegemony captured their minds and identities and that the self-reflection process was necessary for them to critically analyze the degrees to which they internalized Western and their Indigenous knowledge and values at different levels. These experiences became pivotal moments in the research processes as these experiences contributed toward the development of a critical Indigenous consciousness within the educators and students.

By not being conscious of including Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, educators are contributing to the issue of the loss of cultural identity with their Indigenous students. When teachers and educational leaders in our Indigenous school systems are unaware of their unconscious hegemonic tendencies toward Western culture, they fail to question their curriculum policies and practices in their schools and classrooms; thus perpetuating and privileging Western knowledge systems that contribute to such issues as the youth losing their Indigenous identities. As a result of the self-reflexive and dialogic processes, new points of negotiation and tensions emerged as the students reflected on their identities and as the educators reflected on education policies and their pedagogy. Each participant began contemplating various ways to make changes—the students spoke of ways to reclaim their Diné identity and the teachers articulated different ways they would balance their curriculum and pedagogy.

Responses to Indigenous Knowledge: "It Made Me Think About My Life"

The recovery of one's Indigenous knowledge and culture are essential to the decolonization process. The educators and students reflected that the recovery of their cultural knowledge was necessary to place their Indigenous knowledge at the forefront of their thinking. For instance, by exposing the Diné youth participants to the Diné stories and philosophy (see

Denetdale, 2007); the youth exhibited a heightened awareness of their Diné epistemology and therefore placed the stories and the philosophy of life at the forefront of their consciousness. For example, some of the youth made connections to their personal actions and behaviors as most of them expressed that the philosophy made them think about "behaving more." One student's response regarding the Diné philosophy of life, *Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hozhóón*, (which is the process of becoming and learning throughout life's journey) connected the philosophy to her daily actions and behavior:

> It made me think about my life and how it is because if you get sad, you kind of go off the path [of *hozhó*, which is a state of balance and harmony in life] and you're not in the right state of mind. So I was thinking about it and I was thinking about how many times I went off and I was like, it would've been a whole bunch if I actually counted it.

In addition, one student who conducts motivational speeches at various events throughout the Diné Nation and at different conferences throughout the US noted that the Diné philosophy of life inspired him to think about how Diné children might benefit from learning about the philosophy. He articulated:

> The Navajo philosophy of life is a good way to teach children so that they could think about their future and how they're going to live. It's also good to stay on the right path so you could live a normal and healthy life as you're going along and you're growing up to be an adult. And it also teaches you to be respectful to others around you and how to treat everybody the same way. And they'll treat you with respect.

"How they're going to live" provides a powerful space of analysis in which the youth were able to begin thinking through how access to Diné epistemologies would also inform their pathway to adulthood and life choices. The Diné stories and philosophy strengthened the students' self-perception of being Diné and motivated them to continue increasing their Diné cultural knowledge. This reaffirmation of their Diné identity evoked an internal drive to fill the void in their understandings of Diné cultural knowledge—in other words; they developed a sense of agency that motivated them to pursue various ways to learn about their Diné identity. Just as the Diné students began developing positions of personal agency, so too did the Hopi/Tewa educators as they began rethinking and reassessing how they would enact a curriculum and pedagogy that intentionally included Indigenous knowledge systems.

After the Hopi/Tewa educators discussed the theoretical frameworks of TribalCrit and Red Pedagogy, the subsequent focus group session concentrated on deconstructing Western and Indigenous knowledge and value systems. This was another pivotal moment in which the educators began analyzing their own curriculum and pedagogical practices. Each educator came to the realization that the majority of their curriculum and pedagogy was based on Western knowledge and values with minimal or no inclusion of Hopi/Tewa knowledge systems. One participant expressed:

> It made me feel like I limited the true education that students who come from a strong culture—who come from a strong background of Indigenous knowledge—I limited that opportunity for them to draw from their own experiences because to be honest, the very

> beginning of my curriculum was very straightforward and it was about pounding out and knocking out standards.

This particular educator was especially grateful for being introduced to the theoretical frameworks in conjunction with deconstructing Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and values because this critical examination engaged her in the process of deeply analyzing and reconfiguring her curriculum and teaching practices. Another educator conceptualized his thoughts on this analysis, "It was an eye-opener for me. I think it made me look at curriculum differently—the way I teach and the way that I use it, the way I use my words and how to make things more relevant." This process helped the educators become aware of the importance of infusing Indigenous Hopi/Tewa cultural knowledge into the curriculum and finding balance between Hopi/Tewa and Western knowledge systems within their curriculum.

Hope, Empowerment, Transformation and Personal Agency: "I Told My Mom and Dad to Speak Navajo to Me All the Time"

One of the ultimate stages of decolonization is moving toward action in ways that are transformative—individually and/or collectively. The ideas of hope, empowerment and transformation are embedded in the personal agency of individuals. The student and teacher participants exemplified this stage by developing a sense of personal agency that moved them toward enacting self-determination and sovereignty. Notions of self-determination were more evident in the Diné students' responses while the Hopi/Tewa educators gravitated toward ideas of enacting sovereignty.

Self-determination is manifested in the students' thoughts and feelings on becoming empowered to reclaim their Diné epistemology. One key outcome that stemmed from the critical examinations and self-reflexive processes was that the students *wanted* to learn more about their Diné culture and identity through the language. The student participants recognized that in order to have access to the knowledge within the Diné epistemology; they needed to learn the language. For Indigenous groups, "languages are core values in their identities" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001, p. 203). Nearly all of the students (except one who stated that he was fluent in the language) were motivated to ask their parents/grandparents to teach them the Diné language. One student explained:

> I told my mom and dad to speak Navajo to me all the time. I'm getting used to them and starting to understand what they say. Like they would tell me to take out the trash and I would tell them to repeat it because I always forget it and I'd finally understand. Sometimes they would tell me to cook and I would *really* know what that one is! It's kind of fun learning!

Other ways that the students felt empowered was by stating that they wanted to become educators and lawyers so that they could give back to their Diné communities. In addition, some expressed the importance of transferring the Diné stories and philosophy to their younger siblings and future generations. Each of these forms of giving back to their communities is essential; however, equally important is the lens through which they will frame their efforts. In essence, to what degree will the Indigenous values and knowledge inform their future efforts and choices?

For the Hopi/Tewa educators, ideas of hope and empowerment took on new meaning as their discussions centered on sovereignty and what sovereignty means for curriculum and pedagogy in the Hopi education system. The theme of building collective solidarity emerged:

> I see the potential for us to take control of our schools, not just our school but throughout our entire tribal education system, where we [Hopi schools] all band together to make efforts for all our students, all our children throughout all of the schools and we are able to because of our status of sovereignty. We can do that and there's nothing preventing us except us—you know, our belief that maybe we might not succeed; our fear of failing.

Restructuring and reexamining the education system as a whole incited a sense of hope within the Hopi/Tewa educators that empowered them to think and dream about how restructuring may influence their classrooms. Consider this comment:

> The way that we always learned about ourselves and our lifestyles [based on Hopi/Tewa value system], if we could learn that way and be able to survive, survive culturally and physically, then there's potential for that intellect to expand into other areas too. So it made me…feel like there is hope that we can remove ourselves from the control of these other entities that govern our schools and that we do have the potential to bring new ideas into our schools; we can be successful.

The idea of "banding together" to "remove ourselves from the control of these entities that govern our schools" supports the praxis of collective solidarity (Grande, 2008) among Indigenous peoples and our allies. As another educator explained, Indigenous peoples should work together because "we are a part of bigger community" and by doing so, we can "all work together to bring ourselves back up and to liberate ourselves and to be emancipated from all of these regulations that bind us." Evident within the student and teacher excerpts regarding their experiences leads us to conclude that the decolonization process activates a critical Indigenous consciousness that reinforces hope, empowerment and transformation for our educators and Indigenous youth.

Conclusion

During our cross-dialogues regarding our CIQR studies, the lessons learned were that we recognized that the process of decolonization (examining history and power; engaging in a self-reflexive process and critical dialogues; becoming empowered to transform oppressive situations; taking action to reclaim and center Indigenous knowledge systems and values) is essential to developing a critical Indigenous consciousness. The experiences our participants engaged in indicate that an initial decolonization process is necessary before any social justice and critical work can begin on examining *contemporary* issues facing our tribal communities. In addition, our 2 research studies suggest that the theoretical and pedagogical practices of critical Indigenous pedagogy is vital for evoking a critical Indigenous consciousness that promotes the reclamation of Indigenous knowledge systems in schools and classrooms, developing curriculum and pedagogy that is inclusive of balancing Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and advocating self-determination and sovereignty within schools and classrooms.

Critical Indigenous pedagogy provides a lens for teachers to examine the history as well as the current social, ecological, health and political issues facing Indigenous communities with students. Because these issues are about survivance (Vizenor, 1994) which draws upon Indigenous sources for guidance, the schooling experience becomes a spiritual and sacred process of engagement. Implementing critical Indigenous pedagogy that includes Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in schools consequently leads to re-envisioning and reconsidering *schools as sacred landscapes*. When Indigenous schools consider themselves as sacred landscapes where educators promote and privilege Indigenous knowledge in their classrooms and guide Indigenous students in the critical process of promoting, protecting and preserving Indigenous languages, cultures, land and people, it is anticipated that the next generation of Indigenous youth will become empowered to positively transform their communities. Moreover, teachers of Indigenous students should then purposefully and carefully create a space to engage students in self-reflexive and dialogic practices that inform how the students will respond to challenges Indigenous communities face. The purpose for doing so is to encourage youth to take responsibility for contributing to the future environmental, political, social and cultural needs of their community. Upon reflection we continue to ask, how might the current issues inform a social justice oriented curriculum and pedagogy for Indigenous peoples? What are the pedagogical possibilities of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge associated with sacred sites through a critical analysis of the current issues? Will the depth of the youths' understandings of the songs, stories and ceremonies be developed and privileged in order to respond appropriately to such issues and in ways that are healthy and constructive for humanity?

We would like to close by recognizing one of the former participants who is a Hopi educator who reconsidered his *classroom* to be a *sacred landscape* where contemporary issues are intertwined with Indigenous knowledge. In a recent dialogue, we were informed of his efforts to engage his middle school students in the process of developing a critical Indigenous consciousness around Senate Bill 2109 (mentioned earlier as the Navajo-Hopi Water Rights Settlement Act). In recognizing that he did not have access to understanding political and tribal issues when he was a student, he wanted to offer a space for his students to examine this bill and to develop their own understanding, through an Indigenous lens, of what this bill could possibly mean for their own Hopi community members. He framed it in the context of their cultural identity as they are transitioning into understanding their roles and responsibilities of young Hopi community members. We leave you with his words in addressing his students:

> A few years ago I wasn't thinking about politics or tribal issues in the government. It wasn't until recently that I realized, "Wow, this is going to affect me." So I told my students, "I am introducing this to you so that one day you will remember this and so that you will be ready to respond and understand it. I am informing you about this so that you can be warriors who reason with your mind. Regardless of your opinion, our people need you to begin thinking about what it means for us culturally."

Notes

1. We have elected to use the term Indigenous to refer to Indigenous peoples of North America; Native and Native American are used interchangeably.

2. There is one group of Tewa people who settled among the Hopi people around the time of the Spanish Revolt in 1680. They have a different language and have adopted Hopi culture; therefore they are considered within the Hopi government.
3. Diné is the original name of the Navajo which is translated to "The people."
4. See Jennifer Denetdale (2007) for additional insights to understanding the stories of the Holy People.
5. *Katsinas* are spiritual messengers who the Hopis and Tewas believe have the power to bring rain and offer strength and guidance for our continued existence.

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