

University of Northern Colorado

Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

Dissertations

Student Research

8-2022

A Portraiture of Two Tribal College Leaders

Jessica Jasmine Buckless

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/dissertations>

Recommended Citation

Buckless, Jessica Jasmine, "A Portraiture of Two Tribal College Leaders" (2022). *Dissertations*. 872.
<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/dissertations/872>

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact Jane.Monson@unco.edu.

© 2022

JESSICA JASMINE BUCKLESS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

A PORTRAITURE OF TWO TRIBAL COLLEGE LEADERS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Jessica Jasmine Buckless

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Teacher Education
Educational Studies

August 2022

This Dissertation by: Jessica Jasmine Buckless

Entitled: *Portraiture of Two Tribal College Leaders*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Teacher Education, Program of Educational Studies

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

Dr. Christy McConnell Moroye, Ph.D., Research Advisor

Dr. Jennifer Harding, Committee Member

Dr. Michael Welsh, Committee Member

Dr. Elizabeth Gilbert, Faculty Representative

Date of Dissertation Defense _____

Accepted by the Graduate School

Jeri-Anne Lyons, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Associate Vice President for Research

ABSTRACT

Buckless, Jessica Jasmine. *Portraiture of Two Tribal College Leaders*. Published Doctor of Education dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2022.

This study explored the lives and self-perceived impacts of two Tribal college presidents in a northwest state of the United States. This qualitative inquiry employed portraiture in which the researcher created a diverse range of stories curated through interviews, observations of participants, and artifacts to formulate a story of each participant's life. This study shared the unique stories of each Tribal college leader. Their stories were captured through questions about their perspectives and how they felt that they had contributed to their respective colleges. In addition to how they had contributed culturally, follow-up questions addressed how they had attributed to pedagogy and curriculum in cultural ways. This study shed light on the impacts that Tribal colleges have had on the communities that they served as well as the unique opportunities that they provided for American Indian students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to begin by acknowledging that I am obtaining this doctoral degree from the University of Northern Colorado which sits upon the traditional territories of the Ute, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Lakota peoples. In addition, I acknowledge that 48 tribes are historically tied to the state of Colorado (Guzmán, 2020). I acknowledge that they are the first and rightful inhabitants of the five regions that make up the state of Colorado: the Great Plains, the Southern Rocky Mountains, the Colorado Plateau, the Wyoming Basin, and the Middle Rocky Mountains (“Region Lesson Overview,” 2022). More than 100,000 American Indian/Alaska Native peoples(s) currently live in the state of Colorado and their oral history recounts their steady occupation since the land was created. I acknowledge that Indigenous people have experienced genocide through colonization. (“Urban Indian Population,” n.d.). I acknowledge that the programs at the University of Northern Colorado privilege dominant Western knowledge in academia. It is through the tremendous work of Indigenous leaders and students that public consciousness, especially in academic settings continues to expand. I am honored and humbled to learn, teach, and work alongside fellow Indigenous educators as we continue to raise awareness of the long-standing historical devastation in education involving Indigenous peoples, particularly in the Indian Boarding School Movement. I am grateful to my dissertation committee: Dr. Jennifer Harding, Dr. Elizabeth Gilbert, and Dr. Michael Welsh for their support and guidance in the dissertation process. I am honored to have my dissertation advisor, Christine McConnell, for allowing me the space over the last four years to grow my Indigenous perspectives in academia as a student, teacher, and Bitterroot Salish woman.

To the incredible women in my life, thank you for standing by me for every step of this endeavor. Mom, I am a doctor because of you. I am inspired by your dedication as a teacher and mother. I remember you telling me that applying for 100 scholarships during my senior year of high school would pay off. I did not understand it then, but I do now. I am thankful for every moment that I get to have with your endless stories and love. Brandie, thank you for going the extra mile when I needed to practice doctorate presentations, and being an extra reviewer of my work. You have been an active part of my graduate school journey. I thank the Creator every day for blessing me with such a wonderful example of love with a sister. This doctorate is for both of you and the generations of incredible women that we come from. Dooset Daram Demetrius, thank you for being my biggest fan and supporter. Dad, thank you for letting me be me and celebrating my authenticity. I would have never pursued a doctorate without it.

My experiences growing up as a member of the Bitterroot Salish tribe on the Flathead Indian Reservation have shaped me and have greatly impacted my work as a researcher and this paper. The intentions that I have brought into this research were influenced by my experiences in education and through the lens of the granddaughter of an incredible Tribal college president, Joe McDonald. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Sandra Boham and Dr. Karla Bird for allowing me to hear their stories, see their work and experience the revitalizing practices that aim to take back culture and language.

DEDICATION

For Grandpa Joe. Your dedication to Tribal communities has inspired a resurgence in culture and language. It continues to build bridges and mend relationships that have been torn apart by colonialism, capitalism, racism, and heteropatriarchy. Seeing the world through your perspective has encouraged me to focus on things that truly matter and to live with integrity. When we do that, good always prevails.

Lemlmtš Su-Sep

Figure 1

Joe and Jessica



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		
I.	PREFACE	1
	The Purpose of the Study	6
	Researcher Statement.....	7
	Background of Tribal Colleges.....	9
	Methodology	10
	Researcher Positionality.....	11
	Organization of the Dissertation	12
	Summary	13
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	15
	Importance of The Tribal College Movement and Success Factors	17
	The Role of The Tribal College and Leadership	20
	Marginalized Communities and Educational Achievement	22
	Indian Boarding School Movement.....	24
	Relationships Between Schooling and American Indian Achievement Data.....	26
	Constructivist Learning Environment for Multicultural Students	27
	Multicultural Education for American Indian Students.....	29
	Previous Research.....	32
III.	METHODOLOGY	35
	Portraiture Framework.....	35
	Appropriateness of Methodology	37
	Study Design.....	39
	Overview of the Design	39
	Overview of Research Timeline, Methods, and Research Questions.....	40
	Research Questions.....	41
	Participants.....	43
	Data Collection Timeline.....	44
	Observations	45
	Interviews.....	46
	Analysis of Artifacts	48

CHAPTER

III. continued

Data Analysis Procedures50
Setting51
 Salish Kootenai College.....51
 Blackfeet Community College.....52
Target Population.....53
Significance of the Study55
Validity55
Ethical Practices.....57
Limitations of the Study.....58
Final Thoughts58

IV. FINDINGS60

Introduction.....60
 Salish Kootenai College.....62
 Delicate Dance63
 Dr. Sandra Boham.....65
 Dr. Boham’s Background67
 President Boham70
 Modeling.....72
 Dialog.....73
 Practice.....74
 Confirmation75
 Leadership Through Caring78
 Leadership Through Culture86
 Leadership Through Language98
 Joe McDonald106
 Outstanding Indian Athlete and Educator.....106
 Joe Today109
 Blackfeet Community College.....112
 Stepping Out of Education.....115
 The Stories Ribbon Skirts Hold119
 Dr. Bird’s Background.....119
 President Bird.....123

CHAPTER

IV. continued

Tribal College Leadership and Multicultural Education	124
The Contributions Approach.....	124
The Additive Approach.....	125
Transformation Approach.....	126
Social Action Approach.....	126
Leadership Through Caring.....	131
Leadership Through Culture.....	142
Leadership Through Language.....	147
Ecology Means Our Way of Life.....	149
Artifacts.....	149
Finding Resilience through Rocks.....	150
Prayers, Family, and Guidance.....	153
Emergent Themes	156
Culturally Sustaining Practices.....	157
Leadership through Parental Guidance.....	157
Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era.....	158
Research Questions.....	159
Review and Preview	162
V. DISCUSSION.....	163
Introduction.....	163
Overview.....	165
Findings and Implications.....	165
Tribal Communities and Higher Education Through Tribal Colleges.....	166
Limitations	167
Suggestions for Future Research	168
Nationwide Tribal College and University Leadership Research.....	168
Participants.....	169

CHAPTER

V. continued

Staff and Faculty169

Non-Native Staff and Faculty169

Conclusion169

REFERENCES171

APPENDICES

A. Institutional Review Board Approval182

B. Consent Form For Participants185

C. Interview Protocol for Tribal College Presidents188

LIST OF TABLES

Table		
1.	Data Collection Timeline.....	44
2.	Data Collection Specifics.....	51

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures

1.	Joe and Jessica	vi
2.	Example of Custom Loon Beadwork.....	54
3.	Sandra Boham Sitting in Her Office.....	66
4.	Sandra’s Diplomas Located on Her Office Wall	69
5.	Sandra standing by her office bookshelf, holding Documents of United Sates Indian Policy.....	71
6.	Sandra and Joe at Salish Kootenai College Powwow.....	97
7.	1958 State School Beavers.....	108
8.	Joe at the Arlee Powwow, 2019.....	109
9.	Joe McDonald speaks at Days of The Piikani, 2021	112
10.	Days of the Piikani Flyer	113
11.	Carol Murray.....	115
12.	Karla’s Office.....	117
13.	Karla Bird.....	118
14.	Karla’s Office Door	122
15.	Sandra Artifact 1	150
16.	Sandra Artifact 2.....	151
17.	Karla Artifact 1	153
18.	Karla Artifact 2	154

CHAPTER I

PREFACE

I nurse my throat with hot tea, sore from using my teacher voice all day. Working with second graders is what I envision herding cattle might be. Being a second-grade teacher is challenging for the voice because they need a lot of verbal direction but has helped me grow a heart that has learned how to mediate 7-year-old drama, such as Pokémon card-trades, or not being included in the kickball game on the blacktop. Sometimes the job involves nurturing a child who has experienced childhood trauma and abuse or the loss of a parent. Nothing prepared me to be in front of 25 children who constantly look to me for answers. One of the hardest parts of being a teacher is finding age-appropriate ways to respond to questions like, “Is Santa Clause real?” or “Why couldn’t Rosa Parks sit at the front of the bus?” I have had students share that their parents are afraid of being sent back to their home country due to new immigration laws and other students ask why their guardian was getting sent back to a place called Prison. I do not know if I will ever feel prepared to see little eyes grow big when students understand the realities of the world but being called momma at least once a day makes me feel like I am right where I need to be.

When I think of my childhood attending school on the Flathead Indian Reservation, I remember feeling like there was a large disconnect with the teachers that stood in front of our classrooms because they did not mirror the students that sat at the desks. Most of the teachers in my schools were White and were not required to teach the students using culturally revitalizing practices. This resulted in students being disengaged and widened generationally motivated

feelings about White teachers in educational institutions occupied with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). I still found school engaging because it allowed me to play sports and have friends. Similar to the students who have occupied my classrooms, I had a lot of questions. I remember wondering why our classroom teachers on the Rez were making eagle feathers out of paper for students to wear during the week of Thanksgiving. It confused me because my mom had shared how special eagle feathers were to our family and culture. I remembered how the elders at pow-wows would get together and do a special dance when an eagle feather would drop in the arena. I asked my teacher why we were making eagle feathers out of paper for students to wear when they were so special to our culture. My question regarding this culturally insensitive practice was greeted with a teacher response rooted in White Fragility. Caporuscio (2020) defined White Fragility as feelings of discomfort that a White person experiences when they witnessed discussions around racial inequality and injustice.

My process growing up after the events of my childhood in education has greatly influenced my decision to become a teacher. I vowed to myself that I would never make a student feel the way that some of my teachers made me feel. I want every student in my classroom to feel like their background, culture, and heritage matter and that they will be properly represented in my classroom. I do not think that taking the time to fully understand students and where they come from will ever be easy, but to me, it is the most important part of teaching.

It can be mentally exhausting to keep emotions and feelings intact for students. The best part of teaching is letting the students in and allowing them to keep my spirits high when I feel lost in this unpredictable world. I know that students are the reason that I keep a positive outlook. This reflection has solidified my resolve to make a career as a teacher.

I begin my dissertation with a narrative of my own experience and that of my grandfather to honor the work that is continuing to be done in education at Tribal colleges. This narrative sheds light on my childhood when I spent large amounts of time on the campus of a Tribal college called Salish Kootenai College (SKC) located in northwest Montana, which was founded by my grandfather, Joseph McDonald. Growing up, SKC was a second home to me.

I learned many life lessons on SKC's campus. I loved seeing my grandpa's assistant, Carlos. Throughout my childhood, I witnessed Carlos transition to Rosalinda. His hair and his nails grew longer. In my culture, we call people like Rosalinda two-spirit. Knowing Rosalinda allowed me to learn that two-spirit people are an important part of our diverse community and culture. Although some two-spirit people change their appearance or sex, we do not treat them any different. This helped me learn the value of love and acceptance. I also learned the value of patience at SKC. I would stop by the college kitchen to see my uncle Louie to get a piece of fresh fry-bread. Sometimes I would have to wait until Louie was done serving food to staff and students. After Louie was done feeding the staff and students, I would find a little piece of frybread sitting on the kitchen counter with a little bit of honey drizzled on it, just the way I liked it. Louie would joke and tell me he was going to charge it on my grandpa's food account, even though he never did.

I first discovered my passion for competition during the summer of fourth grade when I entered the Darcy McNickle reading contest. I went to campus every other day that summer to get a new book from the campus library. This was where I discovered my love for mystery books after finding the Nancy Drew reading section. The library was doing their annual reading competition where you would get a hole punch on a reading card for every book read. I do not know how many books I read that summer, but I did have to get a new punch card because I had

filled the first card up very quickly. I remember my grandma Sherri bringing me to the local city public library that summer when I could not find another Nancy Drew book at the SKC Darcy McNickle Library. That summer, I learned the lesson of living in my imagination. After reading Nancy Drew books, my imagination would bring me on detective adventures around the campus of SKC. I would somehow always find my way into various summer programs that the college was putting on for kids. One of the summer programs had us camping in tipis at Blue Bay State Park learning about the ecology of Flathead Lake. We studied the fish inhabiting the lake that had fed our community for generations. Every morning of the Blue Bay summer camp, we would be awoken by the sounds of a Kootenai morning song. I still remember the sound of her singing voice. That summer, I learned about the importance of women in Tribal communities.

I take the lessons that I have learned on the campus of SKC every time I step into my classroom. I actively practice accepting students for who they are and whom they want to be. I know the value of food in culture and how food can initiate a memory like the taste of frybread with honey does for me. Anytime a student wants to share a piece of their culture through food, I gladly oblige. As a teacher, I have had students share their culture through homemade food. Some of my favorite food memories with students include homemade Hmong egg rolls, Liberian fried plantains, and Pakistani cookies. I share my love for reading with my students by getting them books from the local library. My heart smiles anytime I have a student request a Nancy Drew book. I try to find books about fearless females and males around the world, to help instill a value of feminism so that my students do not have to feel guided by their gender in my classroom or the world around them.

In many ways, the campus at SKC molded me into the person I am today. In many more ways, SKC has given our community and Tribe something that can never be stripped from them. An education.

My grandfather was a famous reservation athlete that made his way off the reservation to college with an athletic scholarship. He brought his love of sports and education into a career as a physical education teacher. His love of leadership that he gained from his years as an athlete led him into high school administration. It was in this role that he saw the need for a local Tribal college. Around this time, he pursued an educational doctorate. To say my grandpa is a unique person would be an understatement. He has earned almost every educational award from the state of Montana, but he will still manage to not take the credit for his achievements when someone wants to boast about his accolades. This is what makes my grandpa the most admirable person I have ever known. When I mention how special it is that he was one of the first people from our Tribe to earn an educational doctorate, he makes sure to point out that his brother earned a scholarship to Boston College and would have earned a doctorate before him. His brother, who was stung with the sickness that takes a lot of our people, died at a young age to complications related to alcoholism. My grandpa has found his way to some of the most prestigious education boards many times, as the only Native person in the room. In a truly Indigenous practice, he is usually the best listener in the room. I think that his trait of being humble is his greatest quality. To me, he is the living example of our people, he is wonderfully beautiful and kind. He is not exempt from the trauma that plagues Native communities. His grandparents attended Carlisle Indian School and his parents attended Haskell Indian Nations Boarding School yet; he still has a positive outlook on education. In his lifetime, he has faced some of the most radical racist people, however, he would never hold a grudge. He has lost loved

ones but continues to talk to their spirits in the spirit world. He lives well enough to keep a roof over his head and shares the rest of his means with his family and friends. No one takes a place in front of another in his family. He knows that everyone has a path and story. He is the heart of our family and community. His legacy has something that will continue to live on through SKC. To others, he is Dr. Joseph McDonald, Joe, Baby Joe, Su-Sep, and Mr. McDonald. I call him Grandpa.

Seeing my grandfather help give an entire reservation the opportunity for an education has not only inspired me to be a better person, but it has inspired me to pursue education myself. When I applied to a doctorate program, I imagined the hours that my grandfather has put into the founding of SKC. I think about his daily reflection and his ability to see the world with an open mindset.

My research focus is directly related to these thoughts. I want to see how Tribal college leaders live and lead their institutions. I want to see how these leaders incorporate culture into their Tribal colleges and gather a better understanding of the role of a Tribal college president. I believe that this will help me gain a better understanding of what being a Tribal college president means and the impact that they have made on their students and communities.

The Purpose of the Study

This qualitative inquiry used the methodology of portraiture to describe and portray the individual stories and experiences of two Tribal college presidents in Montana. Portraiture is a methodology in which the researcher used a diverse tapestry of stories as discovered through interviews, observations, and artifacts to create a story of each participant's life (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). This study may benefit others by sharing the unique stories of each Tribal college leader because it could shed light on the impacts that Tribal colleges had

on the communities that they served and the unique opportunities that they provided for Tribal college students.

Researcher Statement

As a researcher and teacher, I found myself drawn to constructivist perspectives of education. Raskin (2002) stated that constructivists took the epistemological perspective that the existence of an external reality was not independent of the observer. In addition, they believed that observers could not know that independent reality except through their constructions of it. From this perspective, constructions were human-made, and each person saw the constructions of their reality depending on their ability to know what constructions worked well for them, rather than knowing how their constructions would correspond with an independent reality (Raskin, 2002). Cupchik (2001) stated that constructivist ontologies underlined qualitative and quantitative methods and could represent different ways of approaching real phenomena that were not predicated on them. This approach selectively focused on specific actions, utterances, or behaviors of individual respondents or subjects. This informed my research by allowing me to go observe each president in their authentic environment and see how they constructed their responses based upon their constructed world around them.

I was inspired by the works of John Dewey and tried to emulate his themes daily. His authentic views of education inspired me. I thought of my elementary students and how Dewey's practices were at the center of my classroom and my pedagogical views. Doddington et al. (2018) stated that Deweyan themes in classroom settings that were most prominent were: growth, situatedness, open-mindedness, equitable relationships, and a focus on realizing a better human future. My role as a participant and researcher in this project was an ongoing process. As I have stated prior, I have had immense love and interest in Tribal colleges. Portraiture was a

process in which the participants were an active part of the research. This was especially important considering the historical background of research with Native populations. Looking into the leaders at Tribal colleges was a way to further my understanding of different leadership styles and to take a deeper dive into the daily lives of leaders at these institutions. Taking a deeper look into who each Tribal college leader was would give the reader a more concrete understanding of the leadership and dedication of each Tribal college president.

I was interested in studying different leadership styles with communities that had faced trauma as many Tribal colleges were just learning to understand the effects of historical trauma and its effects on post-secondary education. Dyer (2005) referenced the work of Dr. Walter G. Bumphus, the chief of the Louisiana Community and Technical College system, after Hurricane Katrina by discussing his dedication to his college post-hurricane that resulted in canceled trips, spending 7 days a week and 10 to 20 hours a day getting his college back on its feet. Among dedication, many factors went into being a leader at a Tribal college. Cheryl Crazy Bull, who has served as the vice president of Sinte Gleska University, chair of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium board, and who was now the president of the American Indian College Fund, stated that one of the most valuable teachings that she had learned throughout her career was that leadership and wellness went hand in hand. Crazy Bull (2007) stated,

Traditional Tribal leadership is compassionate, generous, and accountable. Leadership that is grounded in relationship, spiritual practice, and healthy intentions is the most effective in our communities. Such leadership finds a path through the many struggles and hardships that individuals and organizations face today. (para. 4)

Crazy Bull (2007) noted that, with the responsibility of leadership, came the privilege to practice the values of traditional leadership. For leaders in other institutions, understanding the lives and

perspectives of two Tribal college presidents might help guide their work with more of a role in culturally relevant education. Understanding leadership at Tribal colleges would be complex and important to the world of education, Indian Country, and the Tribal college movement.

Background of Tribal Colleges

Since the first Tribal colleges made their debuts starting in the 1970s, they have continued to gain recognition through conditions that some people would deem as impossible. Tribal colleges have offered the opportunity for Native people to attend college on their remotely located reservations. Some challenges have been attaining proper funding to keep these institutions open, as well as attaining students. Tribal colleges were intended to give American Indian students the same education as other students living in non-remote areas. In addition to being geographically located for Native students living on remote reservations, Tribal colleges also taught students in culturally relevant ways that allowed for Tribal elders to be regularly included in educational activities and classes that incorporated Tribal teachings and values.

According to the Department of Education, there are 32 accredited Tribal colleges in the U.S. Although much research was done on post-secondary education, little existed on Tribal colleges and the lives of Tribal college presidents. Studying two of them allowed learning about each leader individually. Such findings could then help us understand the individual lives of Tribal college presidents so that we may learn from them.

These individuals and each of their unique stories were highlighted in this research. Certain aspects of being a Tribal college president and the unique practices at Tribal colleges in higher education could be challenged. This study explored several circumstances of each Tribal college and the unique background stories of each president, such as life experiences, the impacts

of the college on the communities they served, and their perspectives on what made a good college president.

Methodology

This study focused on the lived experiences of two Tribal College and University (TCU) presidents. The lived experiences of each participant were distinctive and an evolutionary process as their experiences continued to grow and change. The experience of two TCU leaders was the center of this study and it was imperative that the methodology aligned to the focus of this study.

Research with Indigenous communities has traditionally been conducted in ways that distanced the researcher from their participants. Portraiture was a way to connect the researcher to the participants and to allow for the participants to share an active role in the research process. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) described portraiture as seeking to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people through documentation of voices, visions, authority, knowledge, and wisdom. In this context, the drawing of the portrait was shaped through the dialog between the researcher and the participant, each part of the negotiating process of the evolving image.

A portraiture framework and perspective allowed me to observe each president from a space of authenticity and collaboration. Various components regarding life and leadership experiences were explored. The result was delineated in portraiture and allowed the reader to further visualize the complete lives of each TCU president.

The findings from this study allowed non-Tribal and Tribal communities the opportunities to see Tribal college presidents from a new perspective. These new perspectives

could allow for further research on recruiting, teaching, and supporting Tribal college communities.

The major findings of the study highlighted the unique backgrounds and perspectives of each TCU president. The intricacies of each president in their roles as leaders, their background, and where they were right now in their lives were examined. This research found that the lived experiences of each president led to similar leadership focused at each Tribal college. Those focuses were as follows: Leadership through Culturally Sustaining Practices, Leadership through Parental Guidance, and Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era. These findings offered important implications for Tribal communities, the TCU community, and higher education as a whole.

Researcher Positionality

Gee (2000) described a researcher's analytic lens as being defined by the following categories: Nature-Identity Institution-Identity, Discourse-Identity, and Affinity-Identity. These perspectives are not separate from each other. Gee (2000) described the nature of identity as being a force that a person had no control over. For me, this was being a multi-racial woman. This was something that I had no control over, and different institutional entities brought it upon themselves to guide me on how I should feel and behave with my natural being. The second perspective of identity, the institutional perspective as suggested by Gee (2000) described it as part of someone determined by institutions. Mine would be a teacher and student. Neither attribute was something that nature gave me nor anything that I could have cultivated on my own. The third perspective of identity, discursive perspective, was how people or you saw yourself or an individual trait. In this trait, I saw myself as curious and kind. The fourth identity, the affinity perspective, could be described as looking at "who a person is" as designated by

experiences. In this perspective, I saw myself as a liberal democrat. With all these identities (a multiracial woman, teacher, student, curious, kind, and a liberal democrat), I had an analytic lens that I used to approach this project.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I is composed of the preface, purpose of the study, the researcher statement, background on Tribal colleges, overview of methodology, the researcher positionality, organization of the dissertation, and summary.

Chapter II is the review of literature and composed of eight sections: Importance of the Tribal college movement and success factors, the role of the Tribal college leadership, marginalized communities and educational achievement, Indian boarding school movement, relationships between schooling and American Indian achievement data, constructivist learning environment for multicultural students, multicultural education for American Indian students, and previous research.

Chapter III covers the methodology of the research, identifying the justification and the rationale for using portraiture as the methodology of this qualitative study, study design, overview of the design, research questions, data collection timeline, data collection methods and procedures, discussion of the research settings, participants, data analysis, significance of the study, validity, ethical practices and considerations, limitations, and final thoughts are included.

Chapter IV is composed of an introduction of the findings, description of study settings and participants, TCU leadership and moral education, TCU leadership and multicultural education, interview analysis, artifact analysis, emergent themes, research question analysis, review of Chapter IV, and a preview of Chapter V.

Chapter V covers the introduction of the discussion, overview of the research, findings and implications, limitations, suggestions for future research, and conclusion of the study.

Summary

Previous research has shown that identities within leaders was complex and varied based on their lived experiences. Further, previous research on the identities and personal experiences of Native female leaders was limited, but nevertheless, important. Crow and Paetz (2013) stated that Native American women in leadership faced obstacles such as accessing higher education, lack of access, misconceptions of academic and social ability, racism, sexism, and cultural stereotypes. In addition to this, Ross and Green (2000) stated that American Indian students rated lowest in college persistence of all postsecondary entrants. Research on Tribal College leadership existed but not in the context of these two institutions or these two individuals.

The implementation of TCUs has allowed access and opportunities for Tribal communities to grow, learn, and evolve in ways that western-centered higher education entities could not. Some examples include: having Tribal members working and teaching classes, opportunities for elders to participate in teaching and decision making as well as utilizing indigenous-focused methodologies. Bowman (2009) noted that TCU presidents agreed on the importance for their colleges to understand the local communities and their traditions.

Through this research, I explored the evolutionary lives of two Tribal college presidents. Through this exploration, I discovered that, although they came from different backgrounds and had different experiences, their outlook for their institutions and the community that they served were at the center of every leadership decision that they made. A deeper understanding of these Tribal college presidents and their lived experiences would build connections to other Tribal members of the community and potentially serve as a catalyst for leadership perspectives for

their successors. This research would also lead to a deeper understanding of TCUs for non-Native people, Tribal members belonging to other tribes, and be a window into the world of presidency for people living on the Reservations where the institutions were located. Further understanding could advance other minority-based institutions, professional development offerings for educators working with Native students and Indigenous-focused pedagogy, and methodology within education. This present research helped bridge the gap in the literature by providing a deeper understanding of the experiences of two Tribal college presidents.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Today, Tribal colleges has served as the main source of education for many American Indian people. According to an article on Tribal Colleges and Universities:

TCUs service approximately 30,000 full- and part-time students. According to fall 2010 enrollment data, 8.7 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) college students were attending one of the 32 accredited TCUs. AI/AN students composed 78 percent of the combined total enrollment of these institutions The percentages of AI/AN students attending TCUs are increasing yearly. According to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students enrolled in TCUs increased by 23 percent between 2001 and 2006. (Crow & Paetz, 2013, para. 2)

These institutions were essential for learning, for physical and mental health, for social and cultural interactions, as well as for making sure that students and their families got a nice warm meal for the day. These institutions have been led by changemakers that saw their purpose as so much more than a leader. Many Tribal college presidents were faced with challenges that ranged from student safety and mental health to advocating for their prospective colleges amongst state and local colleges and universities. Tribal college needs were specific to the students that filled their classrooms. These needs were different from those of their local and state higher education institutions. Reservation-living needs were specific to many students

attending TCUs and poverty was a unique challenge as nearly 80% of TCU students required financial aid.

This study highlighted the unique perspectives and roles of two Tribal college presidents. It could advance understanding of Tribal colleges and Tribal college leadership. This review of literature outlined American Indian relationships with education. I began this review focusing on the importance of the Tribal college movement and success factors. This was the most important portion of this review because this research on two TCU presidents would not be possible without the inception of Tribal colleges. Most importantly, it was important to note the successful processes currently happening at TCUs resulting was student success. The second section of my review included the role of Tribal college leadership. This section highlighted the importance of Tribal college leaders and the implications that they had at their institutions. This section was important because it accounted for the specific specialties that TCU leaders must possess. The third part of this review was focused on marginalized communities and educational achievement which focused specifically on marginalized communities as a whole and reiterates the growing academic disparities in academic achievement for students of color. While this research pertained to two TCU presidents working with Native students, it was important to note that public education institutions were failing to recognize the importance and change common curriculum and pedagogical practices to meet the needs of all marginalized groups of students. The fourth section of this review featured a brief description of the boarding school movement. I hesitated to include this section in the initial literature review section of this paper because the Indian boarding school movement has been used as a deficit perspective in education for Euro-Centric educators to evaluate success factors for American Indian students. In this section, there was a brief overview of the boarding school movement and the implications that assimilation had

on American Indian people. The fifth part of this review focused on the relationships between schooling and American Indian achievement data. This was a crucial part of understanding how research among Tribal communities was complex and needed special attention by the researcher to adequately gather data. Being a TCU president included the ability to accept research studies at their institutions and oftentimes, TCUs had their own Institutional Review Boards comprised of Tribal faculty that helped guide the process of ethical research. The sixth section of my review included constructivist learning environment for multicultural students. This section was an important part of my literature review because it described the classroom setting that was most influential to multicultural student success. The last part of this literature review was comprised of multicultural education for American Indian students. This chapter was important because it emphasized the works of James Banks in relation to working with American Indian students and highlighted how Tribal colleges were initiating this type of learning at their institutions. The previous research section of this review highlighted the lack of research on Tribal college leadership, specifically at the two institutions and with the two TCU presidents that this research focused. This review outlined the specific needs of American Indian students and their relationship with the institution of education as well as the roles and expectations of TCU leaders.

Importance of The Tribal College Movement and Success Factors

The emergence of Tribally controlled community colleges was the result of the perception that education should be tailored to meet the needs of American Indian students and the Tribal communities that they served. Boyer (1995) stated that Tribal colleges were purposely designed to serve and preserve the integrity of local cultural values and societal standards. The first Tribal college in the United States was the Diné Tribal College in 1968 in the state of

Arizona. The purpose for founding this college came to fruition with the ambitions of the community to stress the importance of education and Navajo cultural preservation (Haskie & Shreve, 2018).

In a study that examined the success factors for American Indian Tribal college students who transferred to 4-year predominantly White institutions, they found that a common theme among their participants was having an American Indian community while at the university as a critical component for student success. Researchers have revealed that American Indian students who connected strongly to American Indian spiritual and cultural groundings were more likely to persist and succeed in college and that cultural identity was particularly important in the theme membership within an American Indian community (Makomenaw, 2014). In a study on American Indian youth and a public-school STEM program, Miller and Roehrig (2018) found that the emergence of meaning for American Indian students, as well as their community, resulted from an Indigenous culturally based STEM curriculum that used an American Indian tradition as a focal context. Miller and Roehrig (2018) stated that the results indicated evidence of increased student and community engagement through culturally based STEM experiences in the form of active participation and the rejuvenation of a traditional game.

The purpose of this research was to better understand different innovative things being done for American Indian students at Tribal colleges and the impact that Tribal college presidents had on Tribal college initiatives. Belgrade and LoRé (2003) stated that students were motivated by factors such as gender, culture, academic attainments, socioeconomic status, and parental education level. At the University of Alaska-Anchorage, they had pipeline programs specifically offered to American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN) students including the University of Alaska Anchorage School of Nursing's Project RRANN (Recruitment and Retention of

Alaska Natives into Nursing). In this program, they focused on creating community partnerships and faculty-student connections with high school, pre-nursing, and associate and bachelor's degree students. Another AIAN program was the Na-ha-shnee Summer Institute at Washington State University. This program employed a 2-week residency program with intensive classes for high school students in math, chemistry, and English as well as cultural classes, job shadowing, mentorship, and hands-on lab experiences. After surveying students that had attended both of these programs, they found that participants had an average of three people who influenced each of these students to go to college and enter a health field. These were often a mother or grandmother, but also included grandfathers, fathers, brothers, aunts, teachers, and counselors (Katz et al., 2016).

Some universities that were not Tribal colleges had programs that could help Native students succeed through programs that connected to their cultural background. Programs such as a Tribal-university partnership culturally based higher education programs were examples of how higher education institutions were doing many different things to help their American Indian population succeed. Calvert (2014) stated that relational practice and narratives had the best chance of influencing future Native American students who chose a path of higher education because they aligned with the culture of Native American communities. Having cultural programs at the post-secondary level that connected to American Indian culture had statistically proven to be helped off the reservation (Haskie & Shreve, 2018). Tribal colleges offered the opportunities for sovereignty in relation to reservation schooling which has proven to strengthen student identity and lead to academic success. In a 7-year case study done at Chief Dull Knife Tribal College, math courses were revised to link culture of the Northern Cheyenne community to their vision of education and the results proved that, when culture was linked to the Tribal

community that was being served, perception of education could be shifted into a more positive perspective. After this implementation, the students completing their math courses surged by 20% (Ward et al., 2014). They found that culturally sustaining practices specific to the Northern Cheyenne yielded a more supportive climate for instructional strategies further proving that Tribal colleges had the ability to restructure academics specific to their Tribal communities for greater impact.

The Role of The Tribal College and Leadership

The role of Tribal colleges has been to provide education and a place of gathering for Tribal and Non-Tribal individuals on reservations. Tribal colleges have been allowed the opportunity for culture to take priority in all classroom learning. In some cases, this was the texts that they read, it was how they communicated and interacted with each other, and it could be sharing different cultural norms with people from other tribes. It was much bigger than education. McLeod (2002) stated that, after researching Tribal colleges, she discovered that Indian leadership was different in the following ways: Indian leaders needed to know both their own community's values and history as well as European American history because they could function in both societies. McLeod went on to say that American Indian leaders needed to be holistic because Native communities were small and American Indians valued interconnectedness work together on a variety of issues. Indian leaders belonged to communal societies that must accommodate both Tribal values and Euro-American systems where American Indians and non-Indians could co-exist. In addition to understanding how to co-exist in a world that did not always represent the American Indian population, teachers that worked with American Indian students also must worry about a variety of factors that Native students faced daily. Richardson and McLeod (2011) stated that teachers working with Native students faced a

unique combination of isolation, poverty, cultural preservations, cultural disintegration, and language maintenance. The issues that American Indian students faced made the job of leadership in education settings with primarily American Indian students more challenging than in other settings.

Indigenous leaders have played an integral role in the growth of their institutions and in student success. Many TCUs have been tasked with developing curriculum incorporated Indigenous knowledge and perspectives across varying fields. As more Indigenous educators have received their doctoral degrees, TCUs would have further opportunities to continue develop academic programs. Tribal colleges have prioritized relationships with their communities so that they could strengthen the community and Tribal nation as a whole. Tribal colleges have offered opportunities for research, presentations, scholarly discussions, engagement with local and Tribal issues, gain perspectives, and to network with the local community. The task of leading TCUs could seem daunting and those who took on leadership roles knew the complicated task of their role, which was constantly being challenged by external forces. American Indian Higher Education Consortium and The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2001) stated that Tribal colleges were faced with opposition from the American higher education system and federal agencies and that, considering all of these things, Tribal college leadership embarked on their mission to achieve an educational delivery system that was emblematic of their cultural diversity and directed at the most economically deprived people in the United States.

Wakshul (1997) stated that leaders in Native American communities needed to know the values and history of both their traditional communities in addition to the mainstream culture and community. In addition to this, McLeod (2002) noted that Tribal leadership embodied a lifestyle,

which included an expression of learned patterns of thought and behavior, values and beliefs, where culture was the center and created the purpose, process, and finally, the product.

Marginalized Communities and Educational Achievement

In the last 22 years, the number of students from marginalized communities in the United States has increased dramatically ("As Students of Color Surpass Whites, A Closer Look at Numbers", 2022)

Although more youth have been going to school, there has been stark disparities in the level of academic success they were achieving. Ladson-Billings (2006) noted that Blacks, Latinos, Hispanics, and Native American students tended to score lower on standardized exams. Students from lower socio-economic statuses also tended to do worse on standardized exams compared to their counterparts. In addition to this, students whose first language was not English were more likely to struggle than native English speakers in their academic courses.

With our schools becoming increasingly diverse, desegregation efforts seemed to grow increasingly distant. School reform efforts have been attempted, but schools have still been seeing growing disparities between students of color and their White peers. One of the main things that has attributed to the growing disparities for marginalized students was learning in a traditional setting. Alfie Kohn (1999) noted that one place where traditional teaching ruled with a vengeance was in urban or inner-city schools, which were generally attended by children of color from low-income families. In addition to this, minority children were more likely than their peers to spend time taking multiple-choice standardized tests and to be taught a low-level curriculum designed around those tests (Kohn, 1999). Dorothy Strickland, an African American educator, has remarked that skills-based instruction, which tended to be the type of learning that students of color were subjected to, would foster low-level uniformity, and subvert academic potential

(Kohn, 1999). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) noted that the educational system owed to so many students that it has served poorly. She highlighted that the educational gap included historical debt, economic debt, sociopolitical debt, and moral debt. Within these areas of debt, Ladson-Billings emphasized the importance of educational researchers to re-conceptualize beyond achievement discourse and address the underlying issues related to these debts, issues like traditional schooling practices. Part of this included the idea that students must all fit into the same standardized boxes. Milner (2012) felt that standardization was antithetical to the diversity that communities of people possessed because it suggested that all students lived and operated in homogeneous environments with equality and equity of opportunity afforded to them. Kohn (2000) implied that, due to a heavy reliance on standardized tests, students experience a decline in the quality of instruction afforded to them.

The quality of instruction declines most for those who have least. Standardized tests tend to measure the temporary acquisition of facts and skills, including the skill of test-taking itself, more than genuine understanding. To that extent, the fact that such tests are more likely to be used and emphasized in schools with higher percentages of minority students (a fact that has been empirically verified) predictably results in poorer-quality teaching in such schools. The use of a high-stakes strategy only underscores the preoccupation with these tests and, as a result, accelerates a reliance on direct-instruction techniques and endless practice tests. (p. 3)

Milner (2012) pointed out that certain areas of knowledge were privileged and valued over others and there was a socially constructed hierarchy to what achievements matter more in comparison to others.

Indian Boarding School Movement

The intentions of the United States government evolved from eradication to assimilation of American Indian people and Trafzer et al. (2006) elaborated that education was considered a form of assimilation by the U.S. government. The intention was clear. There was only one dominating western-civilized way to live and American Indian people needed to “evolve.” Adams (1995) noted that there was only one way for the Indians to survive the onslaught of progress and that was to be swallowed up in the rushing tides of American life and institutions. Gram (2016) stated that boarding school attendees were an active part of assimilation through public performances such as parades and shows. Gram (2016) gave the example of Decoration Day.

During the summer of 1886 the students of Albuquerque Indian School (ais) marked the passing of Decoration Day (predecessor of Memorial Day) with a day-long picnic. The following Monday the students took part in the Decoration Day parade in Albuquerque at the invitation of the local gar (Grand Army of the Republic) post. The boys wore their school uniforms and marched “in precision of movement and soldierly bearing,” while the girls, dressed in white aprons, rode on a float decorated with patriotic bunting. Each side of the float bore a banner with a different motto: “Anglo-Saxon civilization rules the world, we submit.” “Wise statesmanship demands a homogenous population.” “Patriotism precludes allegiance to civil powers, independent of the United States.” “We are free born; education confers knowledge and power to assert and maintain our freedom.” (p. 251)

These public performances of assimilation like the Decoration Day were an opportunity for anxious White citizens to see American Indian children embracing rather than resisting the

process of assimilation. As a form of manipulation, Indian boarding schools asked students to leave behind their traditional culture and language and embrace a Western-civilized vision of America, public performances acted out the choice for them.

The Indian boarding school movement was initiated by Richard Henry Pratt by establishing the first Indian boarding school. “Kill the Indian and save the man” was the mission statement by Pratt when he commenced the creation of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879 (C. Smith, 2008). Stories from American Indian people during the beginning of the Indian boarding school era shared about being forcibly removed from their homes on reservations and taken to boarding schools. The personal stories of boarding school survivors entailed the horrific abuse that they sustained at the hands of people working at the schools. Denise Lajimodiere (2019) highlighted the experiences of boarding school survivors in her book, *Stringing Rosaries*” In her book, she reinforced the intentions of Indian boarding schools purging children of their traditional cultures, languages, and spiritual practices through individual recounts of abuse. Her interest in the Indian boarding school experience began with the stories of her parents. She shared that her mother was forced to kneel on a broomstick and locked in closets for not speaking English. Sometimes her mom would be locked in the closet for so long that she would pee her pants and then spanked for doing so. Lajimodiere’s father remembered being beaten with a belt and getting blisters from the lye soap that they would put in his mouth when he would not retain the English language at the rate that the school wanted him to. His most harrowing memory was watching one of his fellow classmates die from a beating at school (Lajimodiere, 2019). Many times, Indian boarding school survivors kept these stories sedated knowing the title wave of pain that may occur by recounting the horrific details of these childhood experiences. Although some Indian boarding school survivors did not choose to share their stories, these lived experiences still traveled to the following

generations in what was known as generational trauma. Melissa Walls, an associate professor of American Health at Johns Hopkins University, described generational trauma as an entity that started with an initial trauma which could be felt through multiple generations. One example that Walls gave from Indian boarding schools was the lasting trauma of being separated from parents and struggling how to raise their own children in healthy ways (Kallem, 2021).

The trauma of losing language, culture, and identity has had lasting effects on Tribal communities and many Tribes have been combating this trauma through connecting with traditional ceremonies and cultural activities. Tribal colleges were an opportunity for these traditional practices and language to be at the center of everything that they do.

Relationships Between Schooling and American Indian Achievement Data

Demmert (2005) stated that research done by the National Assessment of Education Progress indicated that American Indian students did not do as well as their White counterparts in reading, math, writing, history, and science. According to NAEP data sources, American Indian students did not do as well as White students in assessments of academic progress. When considering current academic data for American Indian students, it was important for researchers to take a deeper look into how to obtain adequate assessments.

In addition to being a small minority group for sampling, there were rigorous hurdles to go over with formal approval from Tribal leaders and Tribal councils. Sometimes this process could prove difficult because of past experiences with researchers and the benefits of that research study with the Tribe. It could also prove challenging to have a constant population to observe because American Indian students were often moving off-reservation or to new reservation settings. The issue with adequacy has affected imperative data regarding American Indian students. L. T. Smith (2021) highlighted the fact that researchers need to understand that

American Indian people had questions that researchers should continue to seek to find answers for and to recognize that Native people were at a disadvantage when people from outside of the Indigenous community controlled the questions and methods that shaped research inquiry. To more sufficiently do research on Tribal communities, several factors needed to be considered.

Demmert (2005) assessed that there were six aspects to consider when conducting research on Native American students. Those things to consider were: (a) the language of the home and the language of the instructions, (b) the context and perspective from which research questions were asked, (c) compatibility between the background knowledge of the student and the questions asked of the student, (d) the values and priorities of the communities that the student came from, (e) the ability of the assessor to create an atmosphere in which the students felt safe and comfortable, and (f) the vocabulary of the student and whether he or she understood the meaning of the words used in the assessment tool. Until many of these research categories were specifically and strategically planned by researchers, there has continued to be disparities regarding research and American Indian students.

Constructivist Learning Environment for Multicultural Students

A constructivist learning environment has allowed the student to be the center of the classroom with the teacher participating as an active facilitator and observer. Each learner in a constructivist paradigm interacted and engaged with their environment. When a problem presented itself in this environment, the learner constructed their solution based on their own constructed understanding. In a truly democratic form, this learning environment shared responsibility for decision-making. In a democratic classroom, the community of the classroom was the basis of learning. John Dewey (1897) stated in *Pedagogic Creed* that:

“Much of the present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these conceived as lying largely in the do; they are mere preparations. As a result, they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative” (Dewey, 1897, para 16).

In this sense, constructivism served as a conductor from life-to-school and school-to-life. In this perspective, life could be a place where lessons were learned and brought into the classroom instead of relying fully on school as the only place where lessons could be learned.

Indigenous perspectives relied on both the student and the teacher sharing in the learning process. McKinley et al., (2018) framed Indigenous learning as a Tribally self-determined method of knowledge sharing and knowledge gathering. In this perspective, a constructivist approach was a form of Indigenous learning. Castle and Rogers (1993) stated that constructivist teachers developed reciprocal relationships with children, expressing understanding of children’s feelings and desires. Traditionally, children had an important role in their Tribal communities. Cross et al. (2011) discussed traditional child-rearing as consisting of rich connections, especially between children and elders.

Children were included in the cultural ways of listening in to conversations by adults and with elders that focused on the concerns of the Tribal community, and they were able to contribute to the discussion if they thought that they had something to add. Children engaged in assisting the adults and elders as they prepared for spiritual ceremonies and gatherings. All of the children were expected to participate as their age and knowledge allowed. Children did the same tasks fathers and mothers did but on a smaller scale.

Some of the tasks included making nets, tanning hides, fishing, hunting, making baskets quill work and others. (p. 46)

In a constructivist model, children have had responsibility to the outcome of the class and play an active role in the learning process. Castle and Rogers (1993) stated that, in a constructivist classroom, teachers fostered autonomy and self-governance that involved children in the rule-creating discussion. Having a constructivist approach in a classroom of multicultural learners could have an influence on their bias of school, their educators, and the institutions that they attend. Children identified bias at a young age and, if a constructivist approach was not present in their everyday learning or understanding, it could lead to cynicism, anger, and opposition to education (Castle & Rogers, 1993, p. 77). According to McKown and Weinstein (2003), a children's ability to infer an individual's stereotype increased dramatically between the ages 6 and 10 and that children's awareness of broadly held stereotypes also increased with age, and children from academically stigmatized ethnic groups were at all ages more likely to be aware of broadly held stereotypes than those of academically non-stigmatized ethnic groups. Tribal colleges have had the unique opportunity to approach teaching from a constructivist approach, often times with Native instructors guiding the learning process. In this space, bias was limited and opportunities to learn in Indigenous and constructivist approaches were amplified.

Multicultural Education for American Indian Students

Standardized testing, teacher-centered classrooms, and lecture-based teaching practices have still largely affected marginalized students. When schools specifically adapted to the culture and community of the students they served, like Salish Kootenai College and Blackfeet Community College, we would see a decrease in the Achievement Gap among students of color.

To see success in schools like Salish Kootenai College and Blackfeet Community College, the Progressive School Movement would need to continue to acclimate and directly target disadvantaged areas through multicultural practices.

This could be done through Multicultural Education and Culturally Responsive Teaching. Dr. James A. Banks distinguished five different dimensions in Multicultural Education to close the educational disparities with students of color. While all the dimensions employed a constructivist approach, the third dimension of Equity Pedagogy instructed the teacher to change their methods of teaching so that kids from other racial and gender groups could achieve. This could be done in cooperative groups (Banks & Banks, 1995). For students at Tribal colleges, this would be learning nouns in both English and their Tribal tongue with a group of peers in a group setting, while the teacher facilitated and integrated student interest through the suggestion of nouns that were culturally relevant to the group of students. Geneva Gay (2000) described Culturally Responsive Teaching through a process of rituals and routines that built a sense of community among students and created a classroom ambiance characterized by inquiry, discourse, personal involvement, and novelty. One example of culturally responsive teaching for American Indian students was including the Indigenous practice of talking circles which was a traditional method that has proven useful for Tribal colleges when working with American Indian students. Talking circles were when a group got together and shared and connected over stories about experiences and aspirations. In a qualitative study done by Momper et al. (2017) on a Great Lakes Indian reservation, they utilized focus groups in the form of talking circles to elicit Tribal members' views of alcohol use. In this study, the elder participants utilized talking circles to inform the youth of the deleterious effects of alcohol use and abuse. The elders' stories

highlighted the need to rejuvenate traditional methods of healing among American Indians to reduce the initiation and/or harmful effects of overuse of alcohol among American Indian youth.

The implementation of multicultural education for American Indian students has had the potential to have a profound outcome for our students of color. Molnar (1989) noted that schools could have a profound impact in the fight against racism by addressing the interpersonal aspects of racism and by offering schools and classroom activities that taught about oppression and recognized the strength and contributions of other cultures. Molnar's suggestion highlighted the important role that schools played in addressing student predispositions to rightfully adjust classroom topics and expectations. When schools and educators adjusted classroom topics and expectations in multicultural ways, they could create equal opportunities for all students by facilitating education experiences that created caring and thoughtful learners. Banks (1993) suggested that an important piece of multicultural education included being sensitive to issues of gender, race, and identity as well as seeing these sensitive topics as responsibilities as educators. Teachers could acknowledge the diverse groups of students that occupy their classrooms. One example of acting on the diversity of classrooms was having student backgrounds represented in content and pedagogical strategies directly related to the population of students that were being served. One example of doing this with American Indian students was having traditional oral stories represented in learning activities. Mace (2013) noted that for American Indians self-expression in both traditional language as well as written English was a method of survival because it allowed for representation of their life, history, and culture from their perspective. Often American Indian people have been defined and represented as fictional characters in literary texts and visuals. Such visuals and descriptions have included women that looked like Pocahontas or Squanto cloaked in buckskin and sacrificing themselves to spare Eurocentric

civilization. When American Indians were depicted from a White colonizer perspective, they were often dismissed. These inaccurate depictions of American Indian people were a central premise for engaging in multicultural education because it had a great opportunity to tackle stereotypes and to accurately depict marginalized communities.

Tribal college students have continually been constructing their knowledge through what John Dewey described as student-centered practices where teachers facilitated learning and actively learned along with students. During this process, they were both discovering new aspects of Tribal language and culture through active engagement with traditional elders. They were gaining experiential learning through cultural activities. These activities could elicit quantitative and qualitative learning through what Piaget would call Adaptation and Equilibration. A constructivist approach has proven to be beneficial for students in areas that some education researchers would deem the most disadvantaged: rural American Indian Reservations. If Tribal colleges could specifically target students that occupied their classrooms through a constructivist approach with Multicultural Education and Culturally Relevant Teaching, marginalized students would continue to grow in ways that education has never seen before.

Previous Research

Given that the first TCU celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2018, there was limited research on TCUs in comparison to other colleges and universities with hundreds of years under their belt. Due to being some of the youngest post-secondary institutions, minimal research about the leadership styles of Tribal college presidents currently existed. More specifically, no study has looked at the different leadership styles specifically from Salish Kootenai College and Blackfeet Community College.

In one study done by Campbell (2003), they used grounded theory to study the leadership styles of six Tribal college presidents in various Tribal colleges across Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. In this study, the researcher surveyed five close associates selected by the president. The respondents were given a multifactor leadership questionnaire. They found that each Tribal college president prioritized and recognized the need for culturally relevant practices at their institutions. This research and research on leaders allowed me to explore all the important people that would be good assets to this research, such as community and board members.

A background study done on Tribal colleges in the United States (Boyer, 1995) stated that Tribal colleges were “flexible and responsive institutions” (Boyer, 1995, p. 10), that “promote the self-determination aspiration of Indian people” and within this process, Tribal colleges integrated traditional disciplinary knowledge of mainstream academic programs and society. Research on Tribal colleges emphasized the importance of preserving and advancing Tribal traditions.

Tribal colleges strive to advance the understanding of Indian culture. Their curriculums work to express evidence of culture--through ceremonies and the teaching of language, for example--even on reservations where the culture is almost lost and few, if any, members speak the language fluently. In this way, they are bringing the active expression of culture back to life, making it the common currency of the tribe once more. The tangible evidence of culture is in the pow wows and native study courses, but the intangible influence of culture is carefully embedded throughout the entire curriculum, in the philosophy of teaching and the general mood of the institution. (Boyer, 1995, p. 16)

In addition to focusing on preserving and advancing Tribal culture, Tribal colleges were also learning to adapt to the world of technology. Manette (2004) stated that, because Tribal

colleges were often located in remote and sometimes economically depressed areas, Tribal colleges reflected on how they could address the “digital divide.” Addressing the digital divide meant that Tribal colleges could also close other “gaps” that Tribal areas may face. Manette (2004) went on to state that some of these gaps included: the achievement gap in schools, the economic development gap on reservations, the access to commerce gap among would-be Indian entrepreneurs, the banking/finance gap that exists throughout Indian Country, and the gap Indian people faced in health status and health care. Within these areas, tribes were already using technology to better manage natural resources through Geographic Information Systems research.

I relied on the previous research done on Tribal colleges and leadership styles among American Indian people at education institutions. Previous research included other examples of Tribal college leadership and opened a larger view of context for the history of Tribal colleges. I utilized the University of Northern Colorado’s online library database to access most of this research. It provided contextual information regarding the history of Tribal college leadership.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To fully understand and explore the nuance and intricacies of the lives of the participants, I used the qualitative methodology of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The data collected in a qualitative study included feelings through vocal and facial expressions, attitudes, and other behaviors. The data that was collected consisted of field notes and interview transcripts from observations as well as an analysis of personal items provided for portraiture. It also illustrated the importance of attending to relationships and voice. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) used portraiture to document the culture of schools, the life stories of individuals, and the relationships that existed among families, communities, and schools. Their desire was to develop a “text that came as close as possible to painting with words” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, pp. 4-5). In this study, text was used to attempt to paint a picture with words.

Portraiture Framework

This study used a portraiture framework and perspectives to view two presidents and their stories throughout their lives and within the context of this period in each of their lives. Getting a deeper perspective into their lives and observing them in their job setting allowed the participants the chance to be observed in a completely authentic atmosphere.

Portraiture is a research methodology that is a new form of accepted qualitative research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Portraiture was developed by Dr. Sara

Lawrence-Lightfoot for the field of education. According to Hackmann (2002), Lawrence-Lightfoot developed portraiture to document the culture of schools, relationships that existed among families, communities as well as the life stories of individuals. Hackmann (2002) noted that portraiture was different than traditional qualitative research, because the researcher made the effort to rid bias from studies. In portraiture, the researcher's experiences were intertwined in an effort to enhance the understanding of the study. One of Lawrence-Lightfoot's most well-known portraiture studies was *The Good High School: Portraits in Character and Culture* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). In this study, Lawrence-Lightfoot stated that most qualitative studies focused on the system's imperfections while portraiture discovered the goodness and successes within the system or organization through information and inspiration. Lawrence-Lightfoot was a portrait model and when she looked at her portrait, she was able to see herself as captured through the eyes of the artist in a moment in time. She was able to discover the perspective of the artist and was shaped by the evolving relationship between the artist and herself through this experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). All of these things contributed to her ambition and desire in developing the portraiture design.

Portraiture has been used to tell stories of teachers as they grew and developed in their practice. Motohashi (2018) described a teacher through portraiture that was focused on piecing together the evolution behind the teacher-initiated grass-roots change that took place at an elementary school and discovered that, through ethical resistance and self-care, she was able to overcome the oppressive and self-limiting conditions she encountered illuminating that reflective practice could help educators view their teaching through a philosophical lens. Eventually, she became a change agent and a mentor to other teachers who struggled alongside her. Together they developed an individualized curriculum and established a more inclusive and participatory

culture throughout the school and in the classroom. The use of portraiture has been used to assess and better understand teachers working in different environments. Quigley et al. (2015) stated that the implications of this work showed how portraiture could support a deep, dynamic understanding of the context in education. If other Tribal communities recognized and considered the findings and perspectives offered from this study, they should be able to see Tribal college presidents from a new perspective and review some of their current policies and programs.

Appropriateness of Methodology

The methodology of portraiture was appropriate for this research because the researcher had the opportunity to learn about each individual and shared their stories in a unique way. This study explored the background stories of each Tribal college president, such as life experiences, the impacts of the Tribal college on the communities that they served, and their perspectives on what made a good Tribal college president. The researcher's experiences could be intertwined in an effort to enhance the understanding of the study. The use of portraiture was important to this project because as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) pointed out; it could blend artistic expression with scientific rigor from an aesthetic whole.

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people that they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions-their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portraits is placed in

a social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each on negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, pp. 4-5).

Portraiture was used in this study to capture the stories of each person by capturing their voices and impact in a way that no other methodology could. Portraiture was an important piece when researching with American Indian populations as it could become a place and voice to express the intuitive cultural realities of the subject and the researcher. Throughout the portraiture process, the realities intertwined to tell how each president told their story and how I heard the story. This allowed the process of building a narrative for the research. American Indian culture has vastly been driven by oral storytelling, making this type of methodology an essential part of this project.

Through portraiture, the discourse that materialized between the researcher and participants was examined to illuminate the meaning, interpretations, thought processes, and essence of the individual lives of each participant and how it connected to where they were now. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) noted that relationships were central to portraiture and that, in order to effectively accomplish portraiture, there needed to be healthy and productive relationships in place. This could be done through carefully cooperating with participants to insure for interactions involving dignity and care. When handling interactions and observations with dignity and care, the researcher could further identify and articulate goodness from observations, interviews, and interactions.

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the appropriate granting institution, the researcher contacted both participants by email to briefly introduce the study and request consideration to conduct the study (see Appendix A). After receiving approval

from each participant by email, the researcher set up a time to clarify additional factors of the study, a proposed timeline, and provided each participant with an informed consent form that outlined the purpose and participant responsibilities during the study (see Appendix B). All participants accepted participation in the study.

Study Design

Overview of the Design

Vast research regarding American Indian people existed, but few studies focused on the current professional work that American Indian people were doing today. Historically, there has been an overwhelming amount of research that has had a negative outcome for American Indian people. A notorious case of unethical research involved the Havasupai tribe in Arizona where blood samples were collected and used for genetic research other than what was specified on the signed consent forms. Results of these samples were shared nationally (Drabiak-Syed, 2010).

In another study, the results of the Barrow Alcohol Study in Alaska were revealed in a press conference of the village without the consent of the Tribe, which resulted in shame felt by the Tribal community, and it decreased the Tribe's ability to secure funding for much needed projects (Manson et al., 2004). Another study that was done by a local health department stigmatized a Native community by publishing the results of a survey on venereal disease in a local newspaper in a way in which the Tribe could be identified (Christopher et al., 2008). These were just a few examples of how research in Native communities have betrayed Native members' trust by failing to conduct research in an ethical and collaborative manner by exploiting Tribal communities to advance research careers, misrepresenting Native culture, stigmatizing Tribal communities, and by giving little to nothing back to Tribal communities to contribute to Native health and well-being after conducting research.

Ways that research could be respectful of Tribal sovereignty and cultural protocol was to get to know the tribal communities and establish relationships with elders who could serve as mentors and facilitators throughout research, attend cultural ceremonies with the intention to develop an appreciation for the history of Native people, gain a deeper understanding of historical trauma of Native people, and have people from the Tribal community as part of the research implementation and data collection.

To shine a light on the current professional work of American Indian people, this study featured the experiences of two adult Native persons that were each serving as a Tribal college president in the state of Montana. I saw each of these individuals as role models for the work that they continued to do for education in Indian Country. It was important to note that this research focused on each individual, not in a comparative nature, but to highlight each of their unique identities personally and as leaders. To assure that I did not compare each person, I had multiple advisors review my work throughout the multiple drafts of my research. To do this, I made sure that each president had a specific part of the research paper rather than blending them. This ensured that each president had an authentic and individual piece of portraiture.

Overview of Research Timeline, Methods, and Research Questions

I spent 4 days observing each Tribal college president. The observations took place during October and November 2021. During each observation, I had the opportunity to observe each Tribal College president in work settings.

Observations and interviews were decided upon ahead of time and each president had the opportunity to decide how the observation would take place. This decision was made over the

phone, or by email, creating a clear, thoughtful, and specific plan with times and dates for everyone to follow.

Research Questions

This study aimed to understand how Tribal college presidents experienced the process of being and becoming college presidents. This study was guided by four research questions.

Q1 How have the cultural and life experiences of two Tribal college presidents influenced their roles as leaders?

The data sources that were used for this research question were observations, semi-structured interviews, and observation of artifacts. I concurrently conducted interviews to understand the in-depth experiences of each Tribal college president to further understand what made each person who they were. I asked questions about things that had influenced each person. Each Tribal college president had different experiences both personally and culturally that had guided them through life, and hearing about experiences and events would challenge and guide the reader to more fully understand what drove these leaders. Participatory research data collection included the participant being an active part of the portraiture response.

Q2 What have been the most influential experiences in the lives of two Tribal college presidents?

To understand each Tribal college president, researching the different people who had inspired and affected their lives in various ways allowed the researcher and reader to understand each person. Understanding these questions helped me to get a more in-depth understanding of what had inspired them. Mentorship within the American Indian community was an essential part of learning. According to this research, most of this mentorship came from the community and Tribal elders. According to O'Hanley (2014), working with a good mentor could enable you to develop good mentoring behaviors and become a guide for others in the future. In addition to

this, O’Hanley (2014) stated that a mentor could offer wisdom and learn from past experiences and that a mentee could benefit from listening to the lessons that a mentor had learned along the way through their past experiences. This sort of mentorship completely aligned with cultural practices among Tribal communities. The data sources that were used for this research question were observations, semi-structured interviews, and observation of artifacts.

3 What research and innovation have been the most influential on Tribal college presidents’ leadership decisions?

This question helped the researcher and reader understand how new research on historical trauma could be related to American Indian student achievement. Harrison (2019) described historical trauma as cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences. With this definition, we could assume that many historical events had caused historical trauma in Native communities, such as relocation, when American Indians were forced into leaving their ancestral homes to designated Indian territories or reservations. This understanding of historical trauma and how it was directly related to American Indian people could guide how Tribal colleges were addressing it with their students. It also led to further questions about what kind of research still needed to be done. The data sources that were used for this research question were observations, semi-structured interviews, and observation of artifacts.

Q4 What is the significance of the Tribal college president’s histories/stories for the communities that they serve, as well as for higher education in general?

This question allowed the researcher and reader to see how the unique stories and histories of each person illicit varying actions regarding the communities they served. This question allowed the Tribal college presidents to talk about how they hoped to inspire people in their communities, and this helped the reader/researcher understand the underlying community

connections to each Tribal college. It also drew connections from each president to the work that they did and initiatives at each institution. The data sources that were used for this research question were observations, semi-structured interviews, and observation of artifacts.

Participants

Participants in this study were Indigenous women who worked in administration leadership roles in a Tribal college setting. Both participants identified as Indigenous and female. Each participant had varying years of diverse educational experiences. Both of the participants were in their first roles as TCU presidents. One of the participants was a TCU vice president before she took the role of a TCU president, and the other participant was a doctoral college student before taking on the role of a TCU president. The choice of sampling two Tribal college presidents for this research was deliberate with the intention of making the research more thorough, which was allowed with a smaller sample size. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Portraiture allowed for an in-depth view of a person's life and work which was why purposeful sampling was chosen to allow for individuals that specialized in the field that they were in. In this case, being enrolled members of the Tribes that they were serving and having an extensive background in education that has led them to where they were today. This involved identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that were especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Family and professional connections to tribal colleges in the state of Montana provided me access to contact each participant. I sent emails to each participant which included an overview and abstract of the study. My geographic boundaries allowed me to conduct interviews in-person. After identifying the participants, I worked with

them to schedule interviews and observations that were suitable to their schedules. Participants received informed consent forms (Appendix B) which outlined the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and an explanation that each participant could withdraw at any period during the duration of the study.

Approval was sought and received to conduct this study from the University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board prior to recruitment of participants. I stored transcribed interviews in a password protected electronic file to which I was the only one with access.

Data Collection Timeline

The timeline for the data collection was over four observations during October and November 2021. This timeline allowed the researcher to travel to each Tribal college to observe and interview each president in their home environment. Some observations were conducted virtually due to social distancing and public health guidelines. When the research was done in person, each person wore a mask and was socially distanced.

Table 1

Data Collection Timeline

Research Timeline	Research Activity	Research Location
Early October 2021	Reached out to contacts and established observation and interview specifics. Sent informed consent forms	Communication was done online and over the phone.
Mid-Late October 2021	Observations	Virtually over zoom and google meet
November 2021	Interviews	In person at Salish Kootenai College and Blackfeet Community College

Observations

Participant observations were employed as a part of the portraiture approach for my project. Before each interview, I conducted four observations virtually of each participant. The observations were with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, staff, faculty, and college budget meetings. The observations ranged from 1 to 4 hours in length and took place over Google meet or Zoom. During observations, I used a journal page that was bisected into two columns. One column was to collect feelings, thoughts, and reflections. The second column was focused on factual information to record what I heard, saw, with no interpretation. The observation process was informal and transparent. The participants invited me to each observation, so they were aware that I was there to observe and take careful notes. After the observations were completed and the first column of notes were read, I then recorded my feelings, thoughts, and questions in the second column. Written drafts of portraits, including the observations, were given to each participant for their comments and any additional comments of mine were checked with the participants.

When using observations, I focused on naturally occurring events and discourse throughout daily interactions such as interactions with other college administration or students. Advocating for natural interaction was at the center of portraiture. In congruency with naturally occurring events, I asked each participant to include me in meetings involving their staff, community, and other professional meetings. These experiences allowed me to see how they interacted with others and authentically see their varying leadership styles. Being a part of daily interactions enabled me to observe their speech, leadership styles, and collective individualities. I spent some time with each participant to enter a more informal, leader/observer relationship. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) stated that portraits sought to record and

interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they were studying, documenting their voices and their vision where the drawing of a portrait was shaped through the dialog between the portrait and the subject, each one negotiating meaning and resonance and became the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narratives. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, I drew a portrait through observations and participation of dialog in their working environment and analysis of artifacts. When I attended all meetings, my participation was limited to the role of observer. As a virtual observer, I paid careful attention to body language, facial expressions, and voice tone, which was all possible due to technology that allowed for in-person simulation.

Interviews

Informal interviews were conducted with each Tribal college president during and/or after work interactions/meetings. This contributed to a more thorough understanding of who they were and how they interacted with people. I saw each president in a variety of environments. Coding for informal interviews was the same as formal interviews; it started with descriptive coding, went to emotion coding, and ended with focused coding.

I scheduled one interview session with each participant that lasted 2 or more hours. Interviews were conducted in a private and public places that were chosen by participants based on their convenience. All interviews were digitally recorded over a password-protected device and transcribed by me. Once the interviews were transcribed and put into the participant portrait, each participant was given the opportunity to review the portrait and give feedback for revisions and any requested revisions were clarified in the data.

The semi-structured interviews began with open-ended questions (Appendix C) to allow each president to elaborate on the experiences that they found most important. Semi-structured

interviews were followed by observation and unstructured interviewing to allow me to develop a clear understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing meaningful semi-structured questions. Interviews with each president covered topics such as their experiences leading them to become college presidents and the complexities of running a Tribal college in a “Western” world. Tribal colleges were new to higher education. Therefore, interviews regarding how Tribal colleges had changed through the years with shifts in cultural policy yielded insight into the current situation.

The first round of coding was descriptive coding. Saldaña (2009) described descriptive coding as being used for field notes, documents, and artifacts as a detailed inventory of their contents. Field notes from observations and interviews were coded with descriptive coding by putting all of the data into summaries labeled by one word. Large sticky notes were used as a tool with these categories and small sticky notes from field notes and observations were placed inside of the larger notes to have a more concrete visual of each category that came from the data. Words that were categorized from this coding process were culture, care, family, leadership, and prayer.

After descriptive coding, I looked for emotion to code in the interview data. This was done through emotion coding. To do this, I sifted through the interviews and observations and looked for emotion that was sometimes labeled by the participant in interview responses. Words like, love and happiness were examples of emotions that came from the interview data. Another emotion that came from the data was loss. This was prevalent when participants talked about historical trauma from the Indian boarding school era and how it had lasting effects on their families. I put the emotions on green sticky notes to visually distinguish the emotions that aligned with the categories of culture, care, family, leadership, and prayer. Saldaña (2009)

described emotion coding as labeling emotions experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant. It was appropriate for many qualitative studies, especially those using portraiture, where the participant was recounting interpersonal experiences.

The last cycle of coding that I employed was focused coding for the categorization of coded data as an analytic strategy. In this cycle, I searched for the most significant codes that were placed into the larger labels. In this cycle, I was looking for conceptual similarities of codes that were already done through emotion and description. From these, I created more significant labels of codes and put them on new large sticky notes, and I moved and created new sticky notes to accompany these labels. In this coding process, it was evident that leadership came through thematically in most of the coding which allowed me to code each label within the context of leadership. Labels that were categorized from this coding process were, Leadership through Culturally Sustaining Practices, Leadership through Parental Guidance, and Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era.

Analysis of Artifacts

I asked participants if they had artifacts and documents that they wanted to include about themselves as complementary data. Karla Bird responded by sending digital copies of two pictures from her educational graduations at different points in her life. Sandra Boham responded to my request for artifacts by bringing two glacial rocks to her interview.

During my observations, I observed, documented, and recorded each Tribal college president to articulate their identities personally, as leaders, and through their interactions. With each president's permission, I took pictures of their artifacts, audio recorded our conversations, and used the recordings throughout this research project. This methodology acknowledged that audio recordings were not the only indication of who they were or how they communicated,

which was why I did observations of artifacts and observed interactions. When coding for the analysis of the participants' artifacts, the coding began with descriptive coding, focused coding, and ended with narrative coding. Descriptive coding happened in the first cycle of coding that involved reading through the data and coding passages according to topic. In this first round of coding, I created large labels that were posted on sticky butcher paper. I gathered the labels for this process from recorded interviews and observation notes. For this coding process, I kept each participant separate of each other. The descriptive labels that surfaced from data collected with Sandra Boham regarding her artifact were: environment, strength, and family. The descriptive labels that surfaced from data collected with Karla Bird regarding her artifact were: education, strength, and family.

Focused coding was the second stage of coding where the artifact themes were narrowed and defined to add meaning to the data. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2016) described focus coding as searching for the most frequent codes appearing in a body of work to develop the most prominent category. In this stage of artifact coding, I added small sticky notes with topics and transcribed interview phrasing to see if further themes would develop. The focused labels that surfaced from data collected with Sandra Boham regarding her artifact were: strength in environmental hostility and father-daughter bond. The focused labels that surfaced from data collected with Karla Bird regarding her artifact were: strength in westernized education, strength in family connection, and bond with the Creator.

Narrative coding was the third primary method of coding for analyzing artifacts. In this coding method, I took all of the focused-coded labels and created a final category of labels on a separate sheet of butcher paper. These codes were based on the participants' narratives of their artifacts. The narrative label that surfaced from data collected with Sandra Boham regarding her

artifact was: resilience through rocks. The narrative labels that surfaced from data collected with Karla Bird regarding her artifact was: prayers, family, and guidance.

Saldaña (2009) described narrative coding as appropriate for exploring interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through the story, which was justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2016) stated that narrative coding was especially relevant in qualitative research because it represented the participants' narratives from a literary perspective.

Data Analysis Procedures

To be congruent with portraiture, I used descriptive, emotion and focused coding for interviews and observations. I employed descriptive, focused, and narrative coding for analysis of artifacts. The collection included each participant as an active part of the portraiture response.

I analyzed each participant at a time by reading and re-reading written data at least three times for a deeper understanding of my responses to the observations and interviews. I re-read the data from each participant, I paid special attention to surrounding contexts like their Tribal colleges, geographic location, and current life predicaments. I coded for specific words in the transcribed data and listened for themes and substantial statements. I did this by using large and small sticky notes to visually track substantial statements and themes that were complementary among participants. In portraiture, it was important that the researcher paid close attention to presence of their voice, and I did that by documenting my responses or reactions to observations and interviews in a separate column in addition to the factual information gathered. I also listened to the recorded interviews on my solo commutes to work over the course of a month. Each re-listening opportunity allowed me to hear and identify emergent themes and how they united and separated from each other. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) stated

vigilance by the portraitist to discrepant or discordant perspectives created the possibility to “use anomalies heard in many voices, for a more reflexive analysis of perspectives that are outside the trend” (pp. 191-192). I manually transcribed each recorded interview.

Table 2

Data Collection Specifics

Data Collection	Dates	Participants	Location
Observation	October 3, 2021	Karla Bird	Zoom
Observation	October 8, 2021	Sandra Boham & Karla Bird	Zoom
Observation	October 18, 2021	Sandra Boham	Zoom
In-Person Observation	October 19, 2021	Sandra Boham	Salish Kootenai College
Observation	November 5, 2021	Karla Bird	Google Meet
Interview & Artifacts	November 16, 2021	Sandra Boham	Fiesta En Jalisco Restaurant
Interview & Artifacts	November 22, 2021	Karla Bird	Blackfeet Community College
In-Person Observation	November 22, 2021	Karla Bird	Blackfeet Community College

Setting

Salish Kootenai College

Salish Kootenai College (SKC) was located on the Flathead Indian Reservation and nestled into the Mission Mountains in the town of Pablo, Montana. Salish Kootenai College has grown to over 800 students and serviced close to 70% of first-generation college students since it was founded in 1977. It was started as a branch campus of Flathead Valley Community College, located in Kalispell, Montana. In 1981, Salish Kootenai College broke ties with Flathead Valley

Community College and became a self-governing institution. Salish Kootenai College offered 6 certificate programs, 24 associate degrees, 17 bachelor's degrees, and 2 master's degrees.

Academic areas for students to explore 2343 business, office professions, education, engineering, forestry, hydrology, information technology, life sciences, mathematics, wildlife and fisheries, Tribal historic preservation, Tribal governance and administration, allied health, community health and development, dental assisting technology, nursing, fine arts, liberal arts, digital design and technology, highway construction training, chemical dependency counseling, psychology, and social work.

Blackfeet Community College

Blackfeet Community College (BCC) was located in the town of Browning, Montana, on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Blackfeet Community College was established in 1974 and currently serve over 2,000 students. The campus included 725 acres and was adjacently located across from Glacier National Park. Blackfeet Community College offered certificates and associate degrees in business and information technology, education and health, humanities, human services, math, science, and nursing degrees.

Both SKC and BCC were founded because of an ongoing need to find accessible educational resources for people living on the reservation. Of the seven reservations in the state of Montana, the Flathead Indian Reservation and Blackfeet Indian Reservation were home to dramatic mountains that brought various challenges and beauty to each of them. Being a mountain reservation could create an environment that could be very isolating. Both reservations had people that had lived on the reservations for generations. When both Tribal colleges opened their doors, elders in the community had hoped to restore Tribal languages and culture to their people. Another goal was to infuse culture with education. Having Tribal colleges on

reservations was important for several reasons. It could eliminate the commuting or relocating factor that many Native people faced when first attending college. In addition to this, it could also allow Native people to have a Tribal community while receiving free or reduced education, depending on the Tribal college.

The History Channel described reservations as:

Tracts of land for Native Americans to live on as White settlers took over their land. The main goals of Indian reservations were to bring Native Americans under U.S. government control, minimize conflict between Indians and settlers and encourage Native Americans to take on the ways of the white man. But many Native Americans were forced onto reservations with catastrophic results and devastating, long-lasting effects (History, 2019, para 1).

Salish Kootenai College and Blackfeet Community College both allowed for students to be immersed in traditional cultural activities. Many students learned by doing and having the opportunity to learn and grow as individuals. Both colleges had students learning in ways the education philosophers would call a constructivist approach to learning.

Target Population

The goal of this project was to study the two Tribal college presidents residing at Salish Kootenai College and Blackfeet Community College. The state of Montana was chosen because of my personal connections to Tribal colleges in Montana. The choice of sampling two Tribal college presidents for this research was to make the research more intentional, which was allowed with smaller sample size. Hazard (2014) stated that the logic and power of purposeful sampling led to selecting participants that would provide rich and diverse information. The portraits of each Tribal college president were obtained by contacting each president and

accommodating their schedule to meet for observations and interviews. Figure 2 is an example of traditional beadwork. The beadwork was done by an Ojibwe artist and was offered as compensation for participation.

Figure 2

Example of Custom Loon Beadwork



Historically, beadwork has been used for currency throughout history and trading with American Indian people. Beadwork today has remained an important cultural artifact that has taught us important things about history and different tribes. Each president was given an informed consent form before participating. Requirements to be a Tribal college president at an accredited institution varied from institution but typically held a doctorate and were an enrolled member of that tribe. Tribal enrollment was different in every tribe. For Salish, Kootenai and the Blackfeet tribes, the requirement to be enrolled required each person to have at least one-fourth degree blood quantum. Each Tribal college in the state of Montana served as a community

college and prepared students of all ages for a lifetime of careers. Some Tribal colleges offered associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees. The population of students at each Tribal college ranged in age. Each Tribal college also ranged from full-time to part-time students. Some students at these colleges were non-degree seeking and took classes of interest for personal growth.

Significance of the Study

This study fitted the landscape of Tribal colleges by exploring the background and histories of each college and how each of their historical backgrounds influenced how their leaders operated. To accurately serve American Indian students, the nation and communities needed to look into the demographics that specifically made up reservations and Tribal communities. Themes emerged and furthered my understanding of the individual stories of each Tribal college president. These themes shaped the organization of the data for portrayal in my final document of portraiture.

Validity

Truth and value were assessed through the portraiture and how it accurately discovered human experiences. Portraiture could do this through thorough descriptive language and evaluation of artifacts. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) described validity and reliability as focusing on the convergence of a narrative and analysis and its goal of speaking to broader audiences and linking inquiry to public discourse and social transformation. This standard of authenticity rather than the traditional standards of reliability and validity explicitly recognized the uses of the self as the primary research for documenting and interpreting the experiences of the people and cultures being studied.

Merriam (1988) stated that external validity was concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study could be applied to other situations. Understanding what made a good Tribal college president was something that could be valid when working with many other marginalized groups in a higher education setting. This study did not put a large emphasis on external validity because the goal of the research was to capture the story of the life of each participant instead of using the research to apply to other people in other settings Seltiz et al. (1976). Reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability, and repeatability of the informant's accounts as well as the investigators' ability to collect and record information accurately. Reliability counted on a uniformity that relied on triangulation (Leung, 2015). Triangulation was the reliance on several methods to acquire data, for example, conducting interviews and observing behaviors (Glesne, 2016). This study was considered reliable because triangulation was done through personal observations, interviews, and artifact observations. It was also reliable because I reviewed other research related to this study and made notes about anything different that showed up in the findings. Trustworthiness as described by Guba (1981) was based on four aspects relevant to both qualitative and quantitative research: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Applicability referred to the application to other contexts, settings, or with other groups. The researcher found applicability through reviewing findings from other similar research to see if the findings from this project were consistent with other similar projects. It was important to note that biases could surface during qualitative research. The researcher had personal experiences and affiliations with Tribal colleges in Montana. The researcher stated these biases and reflected on them throughout the research process. Each TCU president looked at their portraits and emergent themes to help with trustworthiness.

The research process was done using semi-structured interviews and observation of personal artifacts as the primary research approach with the narrative methodology of portraiture to analyze the individual stories. I began with unstructured questions such as the following: How do you describe your journey to success? Follow-up questions were used for clarification, if necessary. The participants talked about a wide variety of topics throughout an extended interview. In addition, the participants were asked to bring in a personal artifact, and observations were conducted to be used in the portraiture of this qualitative study. Artifact requests were a way for the researcher to allow the participants to bring an artifact that represented them in some way. All interviews were recorded and varied from an hour to more than an hour. The interviews were carried out in a conversational style with open-ended questions.

Along with recorded interviews, the researcher took field notes in addition to the interviews, observations, and observation of personal artifacts. Reflective notes were taken while listening to recorded interviews. In addition to the interviews and observations and artifacts, the researcher obtained other data throughout the study, such as information about each Tribal college as an ongoing literature review.

Ethical Practices

Ethical practices remained relevant through this qualitative study of the unique lives of each Tribal college president. The ethical practices were presented clearly in the IRB and approved by the IRB committee at the University of Northern Colorado. This IRB indicated that the researcher was expected to be ethical and protect the research subjects by being transparent about each part of the project. The purpose of the research and how the researcher used the new information was transparent.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to two college presidents at two Tribal colleges in northwest Montana because of the time constraints involved in interviewing and subsequent data analysis. Due to the lack of research on Tribal colleges, it was difficult to identify the scope of works that have been done so far in this research area. Due to this, it made it difficult to use the literature review as findings that could be used as a foundation for me to build upon to achieve my research objectives. Another limitation to this study was researching in a pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions affected travel, interactions, and observations required for this research.

Final Thoughts

Studying two Tribal college leaders opened the field of research to explore not only what Tribal colleges were doing to elicit educational change but to explore the leaders to take on endeavors much deeper than education. It allowed us to see their perspectives, views, and daily lives as leaders to one of the most marginalized groups in the United States. One of the biggest challenges that these leaders faced was the growing disparities in the achievement gap for American Indian students. Institutionally driven issues could not be changed overnight, but efforts such as the implementation of Tribal colleges could continue to encourage change. The growing types of research among American Indian communities were allowing people a window into the “richness” of culture and experience that could otherwise go unnoticed. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) stated that,

Portraiture is a qualitative methodology designed to “capture the richness, complexity and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences. (p. 3).

Portraiture combines rigorous empirical inquiry with aesthetics and the art of writing to create research that is accessible to a wide range of audiences in the academy and beyond. The method concerns itself with a search for “goodness,” though it recognizes that goodness is inherently “laced with imperfection. (p. 9)

Portraiture could be a beneficial way to open up a world of research in ways that are unique to a culture of oral history education for Indian Country. Tribal colleges and their leaders are just one way to connect with students and help them see their families, culture, and school intersect.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Portraiture seeks to focus on “goodness” by documenting what is strong and resilient Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) stated that, while using portraiture, researchers could explore the complexities of participants’ lives through conducting lived research that sought to bring forward the perspectives, voices, and experiences of the portraitist and the participants.

This study focused on two Tribal college presidents within their Tribal college settings navigating leadership, personal struggles, and something that was not intended to be part of the research but did complicate the research process was the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The portraitist in this research searched for goodness and looked for moments that led to success. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) noted, I looked for ways in which the subjects would meet, negotiate, and overcome challenges. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) stated goodness could be found in the rhythm of schools and classrooms, how students and staff were treated, the expectations set forth by the teachers and administrators, and how people negotiate these terrains.

The following portraits aimed to capture the complex lives of two Tribal college presidents. Although their complex lives and careers could not be summed up into a research study, there were many points throughout their day-to-day that could be moments of “goodness.” Each president woke up every morning ready to take on the next storm or celebrate new

accomplishments at their institutions. Each portrait painted a clear picture of each person by illuminating their past histories, presented experiences and hopes for the futures of their institutions. Chapman (2005) characterized portraiture as incorporating traditional models of research with interdisciplinary modes of descriptive analyses. Although she did not specify that the methodology represented people of color, Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1986) "portraiture" attempted to tell the stories of people who did not have "voice" in the realm of academia:

For the past several years my research has been for a more complicated, multifaceted definition of school effectiveness--what I call goodness--and my attempt has been to find research approaches that would correspond to and echo this more contextual, multifaceted definition, as well as reveal the voices, perspectives, and wisdom of the actors in school settings, the creators of school culture. The method of inquiry I call portraiture, the motivation I now recognize as a modest gesture towards empowering school people. (p. 13)

The creation of portraiture was a response to the marginalization and sterilization of the experiences of teachers, administrators, and students in schools. The portraiture method rejected flat, stereotypical explanations for school success or failure and depicted the multiple layers of contexts represented by events and people.

Sandra Boham, President of Salish Kootenai College, and Karla Bird, President of Blackfeet Community College, consented to participate in this research and each had unique stories about their journeys to becoming Tribal college presidents. Former Salish Kootenai College President, Joe McDonald, was also weaved throughout the portraiture, as he joined me on my journey to visit President Bird in Browning, Montana, and had personal visits with

President Boham. I start this portraiture by describing the setting of each Tribal college followed by the individual portraitures of Karla Bird and Sandra Boham.

Salish Kootenai College

The fall of 2021 looked a little different at Salish Kootenai College (SKC). “Three Wolves,” where students once gathered to eat breakfast and lunch while discussing classes and how their children might be adjusting to the new school year, was currently closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Salish Kootenai College resides in Lake County and the fall of 2021, when SKC opened its doors to students in person, they did it with the utmost caution in mind. Students were required to wear masks and must be six feet apart at all times. Common eating areas were not open and students were asked to wipe down any areas that they sat at with a sanitizing wipe. These precautions were not paralleled with local public schools in Lake County and were much more relaxed in their prevention efforts, but SKC had the autonomy to make these decisions and did not cut any corners when it came to protecting their students, staff, and faculty during the uncertain times of surviving a pandemic. Salish Kootenai College hired a COVID-19 Specialist whose purpose was to work with students and faculty regarding their status with COVID-19 and advise them on the steps to properly take. If a student came down with COVID-19 or was exposed, they were asked to contact the COVID-19 Specialist who worked with them on the next steps. Instructors were asked to be flexible and keep much of their classwork virtual in case students or faculty would need to go virtual at any given moment. Although SKC looked and felt different in the fall of 2021, the Mission Mountains that towered over that campus still gave the rising sun a glow every morning and were a constant reminder that, although the world might seem chaotic, the mountains that had sustained the Flathead

Reservation for generations were still there, in the background of SKC for every sunrise and sunset.

The total student count in the fall of 2021 sat at 716 students. Seventy-five percent of the total student count were registered as full-time students and 25% were registered as part-time students. As a Tribal college, SKC must stay at over 50% Tribal-affiliated students to continue to be accredited and funded by the federal government as a public institution. Salish Kootenai College currently had 50% of their student population that were Tribal members and 16% of the students identified as Tribal descendants, or less than one-fourth blood quantum. Of those students, 43% were members of SKC's local tribes that resided on the Confederated Flathead Indian Reservation, 36% came from other tribes throughout the state of Montana and 21% were Tribal Members from tribes outside of Montana. Salish Kootenai College had 70%, first-generation college students. Salish Kootenai College's campus had continued to grow with new department buildings sprawling up around campus. In the spring of 2022, SKC had a new dental hygienist and nursing building equipped with the latest technology to prepare the students to take jobs in any environment. In 2021, SKC became home to two master's degrees in education and natural resources.

Delicate Dance

Traditional research in the Western context of higher education has been the dominant context and presents itself in ways such as condensed interviews. Indigenous methodologies and knowledge have differed from that of Western research methodologies. Indigenous epistemology focuses on the interconnectedness of physical and spiritual aspects of the world in ways that are fluid, nonlinear, and rational (Kovach, 2005). In addition to this, Indigenous cultures focus on a holistic understanding of the whole that emerges from existence and experiences. Traditional

Western worldviews tend to be more concerned with science and concentrate on compartmentalized knowledge that focuses on understanding the bigger, related picture. This research had the opportunity to be a research bridge between Western practices and Indigenous stories within research. Each individual story has not been condensed in a way to summarize the reading or compartmentalize responses. Rather, in an Indigenous context, each participant's responses were as long or short as the participant intended as part of their story. This delicate dance is something that Indigenous people do on a daily basis as they try to live in two worlds. Western perspectives have dominated the world of research, and it was my intention to challenge this with my Indigenous perspective that did not put a limit or attempt to constrict personal stories. These stories highlighted the beautifully complicated world of being an Indigenous woman in leadership. Woven throughout each of these stories were reflections from an incredible Indigenous female leader, Wilma Mankiller. These reflections were highlighted in her book, *Every Day is a Good Day, Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*. During my visit to BCC to observe and interview Dr. Karla Bird, my grandfather, Joe McDonald, wanted to browse their bookstore. He loves to pick up something from each Tribal college that he visits. As I walked with him through the bookstore at BCC, I saw him grin. I have thought about him and his numerous visits during the early days of BCC and how he was an integral part of the foundational process. I could see how proud he was of this community, of Karla, and the work that they were continuing to do for their people and our Indigenous community as a whole. He looked to me and asked if I would like a BCC sweatshirt. I told him that I would like something that might last a bit longer, so we headed to the book section. As we were browsing, I pulled out *Every Day is a Good Day, Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*. A book filled with beautiful stories from Indigenous women all of over the country. Authored by Wilma Mankiller,

forwarded by Louise Erdrich and introduced by Gloria Steinem. All arguably the most inspirational Indigenous women of our time. My grandpa looked to me and said, “Yes, that’s your book.” As I sat down and deciphered through my interviews and observations of Dr. Sandra Boham and Dr. Karla Bird, I realized that this book was meant to find my hands that day in BCC’s bookstore. I was instantly compelled to read the book and was in awe of the stories from Indigenous women, particularly the stories presented by Wilma Mankiller. It became evident that Wilma’s story as the first Principal Chief of the Cherokee in 1985, a role that allowed her to sign an agreement with the U.S government granting the Cherokee Nation self-governance was filled with the same obstacles and resilience as Dr. Boham and Dr. Bird. I thought about the challenges that Dr. Boham and Dr. Bird faced on a daily basis. How was it that they could rise to the occasion, every morning with tasks that could feel endless? I imagined that that they woke up and thought, *every day is a new day*.

Tremendous affection and love for life still occasionally comes calling. Sometimes I feel it in the stillness of the morning when I am waiting for the Sun to rise over the hills near my home bringing with it the absolute miracle of a new day. (Mankiller, 2011, p.127)

Dr. Sandra Boham

Adorned in a fitted blazer, Dr. Boham approached her conversations and interactions with people in the same way that she dressed, professional and thoughtful. Sandra proudly wore beaded earrings or necklaces made from individuals, sometimes students or community members, that used techniques of beading passed down over generations. Figure 3 shows Sandra sitting in her office wearing her jewelry proudly. If someone asked her where she attained such beautiful pieces of beadwork, she made sure to give the credit to the Indigenous artist. In this way, Sandra epitomized the trait of place, often at the center of American Indian people. A trait

that everyone in the community had a place and purpose. Every place had a role in making sure that the community as a whole could function with togetherness. In this way, Sandra knew how important the Indigenous artists were in her community and wanted to make sure that their place was honored by proudly wearing their work. Many Native people saw the world as having four directions that integrated four winds. Many tribes have believed that each of these four directions were accompanied by specific colors. Her beaded jewelry, paid tribute to her vast qualities:

Figure 3

Sandra Boham Sitting in Her Office



Zeilinger (1986), a member of the Lakota Sioux, defined these colors as:

Black: A representation of the west and the foundation of water sources such as rivers, streams, lakes, and rain. Water is vital to the world, just as Sandra is vital to her community, college and family.

Red: A representation of the north that brings the cold, harsh winds of the winter season. These winds are cleansing. These winds appear in every environment. When someone can face these winds, like the bison that face harsh weather head-on, they prove to be courageous and patient. Sandra faces daily challenges with resilience and grit.

Yellow: A representation of the east; the direction from which the sun comes. This stands for wisdom and helping people live good lives. The sun represents a new day, just as Sandra approaches her work, seeing each day as an opportunity to connect, learn and accomplish new things.

White: A representation of the south; the direction at which the sun is the highest. This stands for warmth and growth, just as Sandra continues to take on each day as a growing opportunity.

Dr. Boham's Background

When Sandra was a senior in high school at Saint Ignatius High School in Saint Ignatius, Montana, her mother began taking night college classes and Sandra joined her mother in the endeavor. This was the beginning of Sandra's love for education and deep understanding of non-traditional students. This understanding would lend itself to her journey to leadership through work with the Montana Women's Prison Education Program and her work with Tribal Colleges.

Sandra did not strive to be a teacher. Instead, she had ambitions to be a veterinarian.

When responding to the interview question: Thinking back to your childhood days, what was a career dream of yours?

I wanted to be a veterinarian, or I wanted to be a forensic pathologist like Quincy, who was on TV in the old days. I had an interest in autopsies because it's looking for the reasons why things happen. It also highlights having a voice for that person who cannot speak anymore. Becoming a veterinarian was my dream because I love animals and, there's a helping factor in becoming a veterinarian. I had a big interest in horses. I wanted horses my whole life and when I was twenty-four, I bought my first horse. I ended up with three horses altogether. The first horse was a paint horse and the second two were a mother and daughter and they were Arabian horses. I rode the paint, but I didn't ride the other two. My parents told me I bought expensive lawn ornaments. They would say, why are you buying these horses and I would say, if you would've given me a horse when I was seven, I probably wouldn't be buying them now. When I was twenty-four, I didn't have a place of my own. I was renting and I would find different pastures to put my horses in. It was a pain, but I loved them. After I got hurt from riding my horse, I quit riding.

After high school, Sandra attended the University of Montana to begin her undergraduate journey. During her freshman year, Sandra was selected to teach for SKC in their Adult Basic Education Program. She taught at the Women's Correctional Center and then the Kicking Horse Job Corps Center. She returned to SKC to work in a new program, the Tribal Work Experience Program (TWEP). Her work at TWEP was just the beginning of Sandra's long career in education serving Tribal communities. After her work with TWEP, Sandra began her career at

SKC as the registrar, director of admissions, assistant director of Upward Bound, assistant director of Gear UP, and financial aid representative. Sandra's ambitions brought her to the Northern California Indian Development Council where one of her roles was to teach Indian Studies at Humboldt State and the College of the Redwoods. Her last role before becoming SKC administration was as the director of Indian education for Great Falls School, and later as the director for women at the Montana Department of Corrections. Figure 4 shows Sandra's office, where her diplomas are proudly hung; a daily reminder of how hard she has worked to get where she was today.

Figure 4

Sandra's Diplomas Located on Her Office Wall



President Boham

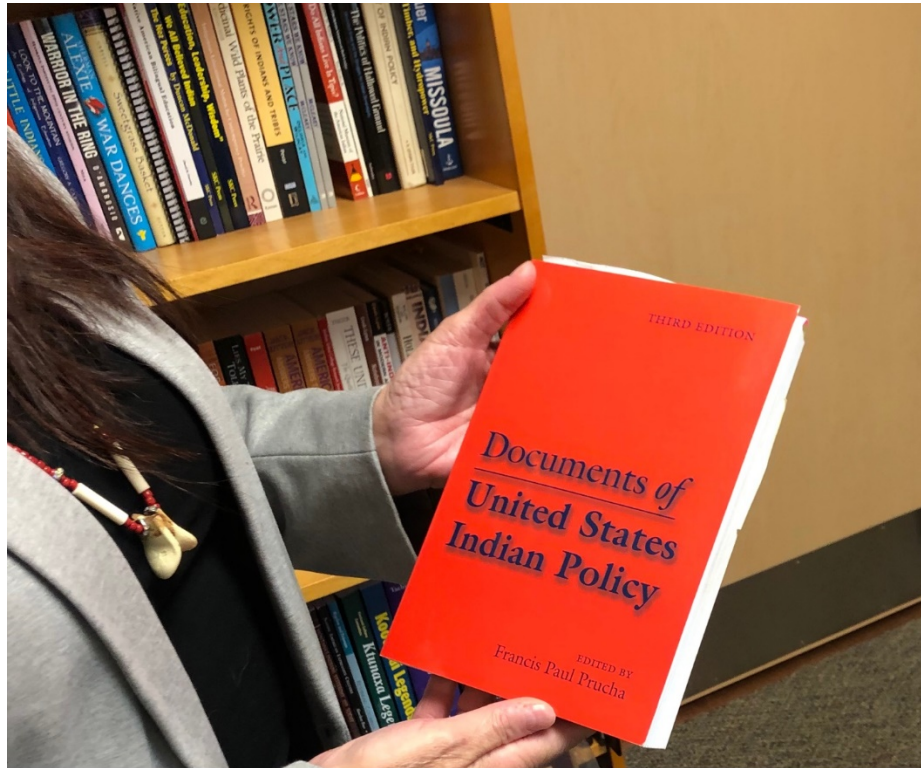
Sandra has been leading Salish Kootenai College since the winter of 2016. Part of her role as president has given her the autonomy to administer and manage the day-to-day operations of SKC. In her day-to-day operational management, she has had to exercise broad discretionary powers within policies and regulations. All of Sandra's decisions involved her partnership with the Board of Directors. Sandra has been the backbone of the college and hires, fires, supervises, evaluates staff and faculty, and works with the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai tribes living on the Flathead Indian Reservation. At the center of everything that Sandra did was her deep love and care for the students at her institution. When I asked a question about naming a favorite thing she had done throughout the path of her career, Sandra responded:

I have a very strong heart for social justice, and I've always loved teaching. I liked teaching Native American studies. Doing that grounded me in my thought process of why we have Tribal colleges and highlighted the importance of education and the impact it can have on a person's life. It was very empowering, and I loved seeing the students that were full of potential and opportunity. That was one of my favorite things that I have done in my career.

Figure 5 shows Sandra standing by her bookshelf, holding the book, *Documents of United States Indian Policy*. Her bookshelf was full of books which were representative of her education and current role as a TCU president. When asked what her favorite book was on her bookshelf, Sandra pulled out *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, because it was her favorite class to teach. She felt that it allowed her students to learn so much about history and recognition of tribes, which many tribes are still fighting for today.

Figure 5

Sandra standing by her office bookshelf, holding Documents of United States Indian Policy



Tribal College Leadership and Moral Education

Tribal College Leadership has required a special care that could only be given by individuals representative of those Tribal communities, many of whom have faced the same challenges as the students that occupied their institutions. Sandra took on challenges related to her institution in caring ways connected to Nel Noddings' (2002) moral education theory which was built on the foundations of a relationship between the carer and the cared for. In this sense, Sandra took the role of the carer and the students and staff at her TCU were the cared for. Care Theory has also had many parallels to Indigenous practices. In his book, *Look to the Mountain*,

An Ecology of Indigenous Education, Gregory Cajete described the teacher and learner relationship from an Indigenous perspective as organic like planting seeds and nurturing them, similar to care, as the center of Indigenous education. Cajete (1994) stated that,

Indigenous teaching is always associated with organic development. Indigenous teaching is planted like a seed, then nurtured and cultivated through the relationship of teacher and student until it bears fruit. The nature and quality of the relationship and perseverance through time determine the outcome of a teaching process. Apprenticeship, and learning through ritual stages of learning-readiness, are predicated on the metaphor of planting seeds and nurturing the growing seedlings through time. (p. 223)

Noddings (2002) stated that there were four components to moral education: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. According to Noddings (2002), all of these were active within each environment and their success depended on the foundation of caring relations. “The hand that steadied us as we learned to ride our first bicycle did not provide propositional knowledge, but it guided and supported us all the same, and we finished up knowing how” (Noddings, 1984, p. 3). Being a TCU president required constant regard for support and guidance. Sandra manifested all of Noddings’ components to moral education.

Modeling

Being a TCU president meant that they were under a great moral obligation to represent their communities with great dignity and respect. Indigenous practices included modeling expectations and activities for students. An example of traditional Indigenous practices was imposed silence. Malhotra (2013) stated that Native American practices included imposed silences that incurred a “wait time” after a question was asked so that speculative thought could replace any memorized response to questions. When imposed silence was integrated into

conversations, listeners could develop skills like when to remain silent and when to speak. During observations, Sandra effectively took a silence to illicit a thoughtful response.

Sandra's care was modeled daily when she reached out to students and her staff personally to see how they were doing. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Sandra has made it her mission to protect her staff and students by following CDC guidelines and, in some cases, adding further restrictions to CDC guidelines so that SKC could keep COVID-19 infection rates attenuated.

Dialog

Noddings (1994) stated that genuine dialog was open-ended and was preeminent than surface conversation, noting that conversation in any form was still important to moral education. In Noddings' perspective, both parties had to contribute to the dialog by both taking the time to speak and taking the time to listen, and the most important part of the dialog was that attention was given to all of the parties that were involved. Sandra had hard conversations with staff and students daily. I witnessed Sandra embody Noddings' perspective of discourse during a meeting with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC).

During the summer of 2021, SKC received a generous donation from Makenzie Scott. This was only given to three TCUs in the state of Montana. In an AIHEC meeting that was hosted virtually on October 8, 2021, Sandra was asked pointedly about the donation that SKC received from Scott by a fellow TCU president. The president wanted to know why each TCU did not get a private donation from Makenzie Scott. This was a complicated question for Sandra to take on. She wanted to protect the privacy of her institution and still foster her relationship other TCU presidents. Sandra answered by saying,

There was no application for this donation. It was unsolicited. Mackenzie Scott and her team did research and made their own decision on where she made her donations. We are very grateful for this donation and don't know when we'll receive something like this again, so we are being conservative with it.

This response was focused on retaining private information that was not publicly shared and giving facts without any form of glorification to her institution, knowing that many other institutions did not receive the same, if any, donation from Scott. Sandra responded to this question with ease, managing not to boast about receiving such an incredible donation, while many other Tribal colleges did not. A conversational technique that she may have gathered from her vast career background.

Practice

In this area of Noddings' components of caring, the teacher must give space for their students to practice caring. To allow students this time and space to practice took trust and encouragement. In this sense, one must first know what it was like to be cared for before they could actively care for someone else.

Sandra encouraged caring by acknowledging and fostering care within her institution. This was evident when Sandra asked people from her staff and faculty to open every large meeting in "a good way." When a meeting was opened up in "a good way," it was opened by someone asking the Creator for different forms of guidance, protection, and gratitude. In this sense, Sandra was instilling the process of caring for our community and encouraging people to share ways that they might ask the Creator for guidance to continue to care for our world.

Confirmation

This last component of caring in education was acknowledging people's motives for actions and confirming their actions to align to a caring motive. Sandra showed confirmation in caring by talking to her staff about how they could continue to take precautions when out in the community to continue to curb the pandemic. In a staff meeting on January 29, 2022, Sandra told her staff,

I know that many of you want to get back to normal life. But I am asking all of you to please limit your time when you are outside of work so that we continue to control the spread of COVID-19 on our campus.

Sandra shared with her staff that she understood their desires to get back to a "normal" life but that it could cause more harm to the college community so that, although they had a desire to go out without precaution, it was important to remember the consequences of those actions and remember a caring motive that could ultimately protect the health and safety of her staff and students.

Observing Sandra in AIHEC meetings, interviews for Montana Public Radio and staff meetings, Sandra's heart for caring was undoubtedly at the center of her work. The interview transcript is as follows:

Jessica: What are the characteristics of career paths that you followed in your journey to becoming a TCP?

Sandra shifts a bit in her chair as she begins to relive her long career path. A smile grows and she responds.

Sandra: I took kind of a ping-pong career path. I've done a lot of different things. I had to not be afraid of change and embrace new opportunities and I think that's something that I did. When an opportunity to do something presents itself like

teaching GED classes, you go. I have had an opportunity to work in the women's prison working with education and I was like, yes. Same with Job Corps in and working at the college and being willing to take those risks while also being willing to learn from people and listen to what they're sharing with you.

Jessica: When you worked at the women's prison, what was that like?

Before Sandra responded, I could see her thinking carefully. I imagine working with women in prison being complicated for a number of reasons. Her eyes browsed the room before they returned to me with her response.

Sandra: That was hard. I believed that at the core, everybody is a good person and that sometimes people make poor choices. I discovered something very difficult for me and I think that came from being part of a community that is over-represented in the criminal justice system, but I discovered that there are people that are not good and that they don't function as the rest of us do. It's almost like they don't see other people as people. Some of the things that they were in there for, the crimes that they had committed were so horrific. It was hard to discover that you're not going to make changes with someone if they don't want to make changes and that was difficult for me. Then, I started seeing the disparities. I would see somebody that was incredibly violent with no conscience about what they did and then I would see an 18-year-old who wrote a bad check for \$300, and I thought, how is this even remotely fair? Then I started seeing people from the valley that I knew that we were coming there, and I thought to myself, this is not what I want to do. I knew that I couldn't change the system from inside of the system, so I left.

Jessica: I just realized that there is a parallel with you in my grandpa Joe McDonald because he worked at the boy's youth correctional facility in Miles City, and he still talks about that a lot and how the circumstances for many of those young kids were really unfortunate and they were often the result of adult neglect that oftentimes end up in the state prison system.

Sandra nodded with agreement and smiled. I saw her thinking about all of her interactions that she had with Joe McDonald. With a grin, she responded.

Sandra: Yes, I was fortunate to have your grandpa as a mentor. I listened to him a lot. He had a lot to do with my decision to go on for my education. My path probably wouldn't have looked this way if he would not have said, If you want to make an impact these are some things we need to do.

Indigenous communities have relied heavily on the support and guidance from elders in the community. At the center of this was love according to Wilma Mankiller. She highlighted the importance of this guidance. "Although Native people experience hardships and problems, there is an abundance of love among Native people" (Mankiller, 2011, p. 130). She shared those traditional leaders, elders, and preachers all instructed us to have love for one another and to depend on one another for sustenance and support. "When one of us is weak, we can lean on others for a time, and the act will be reciprocated by members of the community over and over again during the course of a lifetime" (Mankiller, 2011, p. 130).

Jessica: Did your childhood dreams influence your path in becoming a TCP?

I imagined Sandra driving south on highway 93. Diving off the reservation into Missoula felt like going into another world. I imagined her walking into the library and seeing the books as endless opportunities of exploration. Sandra smiled and responded.

Sandra: They probably did because I spent a lot of time going down to Missoula on the weekends doing research in the library about professions. I would look at catalogs about colleges then look up what degrees and classes it would take to do those jobs. I was going to be a first-generation college student, so I was just trying to understand the whole college thing because I had no clue. It quickly became apparent to me that I did not have the math and science background that would be needed for these careers. So, I took a different path, but I didn't get serious about college and a career until I had taken night classes with my mom when I was junior and senior in high school and that's when I fell in love with college and decided yeah that's what I was going to do. I also got a better understanding of what it takes to be a college student and what kind of foundation you have to have, and I didn't have the math and science background. I went into sociology. This was interesting because sociology and education both have a lot of statistics involved, but I didn't think of statistics as math. It just didn't translate as math to me. People that knew I didn't have a background in math would say, statistics is another form of algebra, and I would say, well, I never took algebra. Little did I know, statistics does have a lot of algebra.

Leadership Through Caring

I had the chance to observe Sandra doing an interview for Yellowstone Public Radio about SKC's synthetic cadaver, named Harmony. Harmony required special treatment and college funds. Sandra felt that it was necessary to have a synthetic cadaver to align instruction with students' cultural beliefs. This was just one example of care that resonated in Sandra's leadership decisions. I imagined the nursing students from SKC stepping into clinics and

hospitals across the country ready to take on the next challenge with the same training as their colleagues thanks to a synthetic cadaver made available for their cultural needs.

Jessica: How did your culture influence your path to becoming a TCP?

Sandra: We didn't have a lot of traditional culture in the house growing up. My mom went to the Ursuline Indian Boarding School, so she didn't have a lot of exposure to traditional culture. We all knew we were Tribal, and I was always very curious about it, and I would talk to people and try to learn things. Quite frankly, I wasn't very focused on it in my early 20s. I would go to our local pow-wow, and I would bet on stick-game teams, but it wasn't until I met my husband and he's pretty grounded in his Ojibwe culture, that I began to learn more deeply about my traditional culture. I knew some of the Salish culture but not a whole lot. When I started working at SKC, I started to have opportunities to be exposed to the cultural resurgence that was happening because, before this, you didn't hear a lot of languages, you didn't see a lot of hide tanning, other than families that would do it but that was kind of closed. So, at SKC, you got a lot of exposure and got opportunities to learn things that maybe you wouldn't have. What I knew before SKC was mostly academic stuff that I read or did research on. What I began to realize is that, as you know more about your culture, it strengthens your identity and gives you some resilience to maybe choose a better path. After I met my husband, I started singing, dancing and I was making traditional regalia for us and our kids and then all of our kids got named in Ojibwe. I also learned how to make a lot of traditional Ojibwe foods. So, I think I know what it's like to want to know, to not know how to go about knowing, to get on the path, and how

important it is to be able to make those opportunities available to be mentored. When jump dances were happening when I was a kid, you knew they were happening, but how did you know where to go if your family didn't participate in cultural activities? That is not the way that it is today because of all of the resurgence of culture and revitalization. A Lot of it is from SKC because if you don't teach people, then, the next generation is not going to learn.

One of the most beautiful things about Tribal colleges was that Tribal identity was at the core of every decision. Students had the unique opportunity to see themselves and their culture in their daily college experience. Mankiller shared that elders hold the key to generations of stories and cultural practice. "The knowledge and culture of the worlds Indigenous people hold many potential gifts for the world and when elders pass, they take with them thousands of years of unique knowledge that had been passed down from generation to generation" (Mankiller, 2011, p. 44). She went on to share that this traditional knowledge gave Native people a sense of identity, belonging and knowing their place in the world. Tribal colleges had the opportunity to foster this identity.

Jessica: I hear that a lot from people at the college. I hear that it is a place where culture and language are revitalizing, and it is so amazing to see the place that it is today.

Sandra: Yes, that is because the founders laid such a great foundation. When I think about being a Tribal college president, I think of it as one of the greatest gifts and it's also a burden which is kind of how things go with gifts. You have the gift, but then you have the responsibility for it. Who wants to be the one that would drop the ball that would hurt SKC? Not me, but it's always on your mind. What if I mess up? Especially with the pandemic, I wake up every day with the full

knowledge that I have a thousand people that depend on that college for school, for their well-being, and jobs. This pandemic has stretched us all and it's made it even more focused on how important what we do is. The good thing is, we have created such a team environment. When we first started this, I was thinking about the Buffalo when the pandemic was just starting. There is a video that was done, and it shows what Bison do in a storm. When there is a storm, wild bison put the babies in the middle and then make a circle around them all facing out. This is so they can protect whatever it is, together as a group. They make this incredible ring. If it's a horrible blizzard or something and they need to move, they walk directly into the storm, as a group. I feel like that's kind of what we've done. We've herded up, stuck our head directly into it and we're trying to power through it. Hopefully, if we do it well, we've got everybody there at the other end. I don't think it's a coincidence that our college is associated with buffalo as the SKC bison.

As Sandra was sharing this story with me, I was compelled to visualize a herd of bison, gathering together, and facing harsh conditions. It made me think about the National Bison Range that was located on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Just 30 minutes away from where we were having this conversation. In 2020, Congress passed Bison Range Restoration legislation to federal trust ownership to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai (CSKT) Tribes. This legislation allowed for CSKT to take over as stewards of the Range's buffalo, wildlife, and land. The bison herd descended from a free-ranging Reservation herd started by Tribal members in the 1800s ("About Bison Range Restoration," (n.d.). This analogy seemed more connected as I visualize

this herd living on her reservation for hundreds of years, taking on each storm with fortitude. The bison, now in the hands of their rightful caretakers.

Jessica: Tell me about how cultural oral history has impacted your life. How about as a TCP?

Sandra: A lot of the stories have come to light in more recent years. One of my favorites is about Grizzly Bear Looking Up. Grizzly Bear Looking Up would ask every day, "how are the people?" and then make sure that all the people were okay. I also enjoy stories about the Bison Range and stories about our reservation dam and how that was started. I ran into Johnny Arlee the other day and we were talking about his grandmother's gift that he did about the sweat and listening to Corky Clairmont talk about the stories of the sculptures on SKC's campus and where that all comes from and having the stories during our founders week where we listen to past Founders share about the important place that they have played in our communities and the stories of all the elders who helped lay the foundations. All of those connect to the core values of our community. That has influenced me as a president because I think about how uncivil the world is right now. Our values around respect, reciprocity, humility, gratefulness, and having a good heart are the ideals and I don't always live up to those every day, nobody does. But, when I feel myself wanting to be less than gracious, I think about that and I ask myself, is that the world I want to be in? And the answer is no, so it helps to keep me grounded and reminds me not to participate in the ugliness that is in the world because I don't think that has a good outcome. I don't think being cruel is a good way to lead. You can have differences respectfully and I think

that's an important thing to do. I sometimes see people having unproductive mean conversations and I don't think it has a place in our community that we are creating at the college. But I can't just say that's what I think we should have; I must do that too. It's not always easy.

Jessica: I know, there is so much contention in the world right now. It's especially prevalent with social media.

Sandra: I was just talking to your grandpa the other day about someone who wasn't saying nice things about me on social media. He was like, I am so glad that Facebook wasn't around when I was the president. I think what happens a lot of the time is that people write something on social media that they are thinking, but something that they most likely wouldn't say, and by the time that they hit the post button, it is too late to take back and it's already out into the world. I can choose to look at the thousand things that are going amazing knowing that I have things to fix, or I can focus all of my energy on one or two things that aren't going well. Unfortunately, I think a lot of human nature is to focus on the things that don't work and when we do that, it doesn't acknowledge all of the amazing contributions that people make. Instead, it focuses on the few things that didn't go well. Everything isn't perfect but you don't have to live in failure, because that's not productive. We do see that in our community because of the historical trauma that many people in our community have faced. Sometimes people can live in that trauma, and it perpetuates itself, and it can be destructive for these people to have space online to take it out on the world. I'm not sure how you break the cycle of genetic trauma. Then I also think, our Tribal college is less than 45 years old. So,

sometimes we have to take a breath and not be so hard on ourselves. We're still new to this and we have a lot to learn. We still have a lot of growing to get through with our community.

As Sandra was sharing, I could feel her passion for revitalizing culture and language for an entire generation of people. I could not imagine the weight of such a task. In higher education, Tribal colleges were faced with maintaining high standards in a Western context for accreditation and funding purposes while revitalizing and prioritizing their own Tribal communities. Mankiller reminded us of such a complicated task.

The movement of Indigenous people in and out of two often very different cultures can sometimes cause outsiders to draw erroneous conclusions about the degree of assimilation in a given community. Indigenous people have long understood how to move in and out of parallel universes and maintain their cultural values. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 7)

This movement was something that Sandra had mastered throughout her long career.

Jessica: Sometimes I think about how we are just now getting approval for our first master's degree in education at SKC and how other major Universities have had to go through this process too. For many of them, it was decades ago. I think sometimes people forget how young our Tribal college is.

Sandra: Yes, when you think about some of the colleges in this country, some are around four hundred years old. The University of Montana is a couple of hundred years old, and we're not even 50. Sometimes, I think people get hard on themselves because they're not where they think they should be but, we're young at this game. You know, I think about occasionally, people talk about succession

planning. I think about it all the time because when your grandfather retired, they did a presidential search and there weren't many candidates to choose from. Then they did a second search several years later and it would have been nice if they would have had a dozen or even two dozen candidates because SKC wants to have a Tribal member from our reservation as the president and the preference is a doctorate. So, I ended up being in the three finalists and I think about that when I decide to retire, I want there to be a lot of people to choose from. So, I'm always trying to encourage our local Tribal members to go out and earn their doctorates. I want them to learn about AIHEC. I want them to learn about the American Indian College Fund. I want them to learn about how Tribal colleges are funded and what the budgeting process looks like. I want them to learn how you work through accreditation and have it spread out because that's how you grow the next group of potential TCU presidents. My goal when I'm done is that they'll have a lot of people to choose from because, ideally, I'd like to do this for at least ten more years. Your grandfather was almost eighty when he retired. He stayed in for a very, very, long time and he's not out. He still contributes to SKC quite a bit. I'm always looking for opportunities for our Tribal member employees to advance and learn as much as they can. That's how your grandpa taught us and those of us who wanted to learn, he would encourage us. You can't be in this for yourself. If you get into this for yourself, you won't make it because you need a lot of support and a lot of people who can help guide your process around you. You can't know everything. You need people around you that know what you

don't know or know more about what you already know to help contribute to moving things forward in a good way.

Leadership Through Culture

Culturally revitalizing practices have been prevalent in all areas of SKC. They prioritized hiring faculty and staff that were Tribally affiliated and they provided culturally sustaining training for staff to best meet the needs of students. Salish and Kootenai language and cultural classes were offered from fluent speakers and teachers. Sandra opened each staff meeting by starting in a good way and giving gratitude to the Creator and mother earth for sustaining our communities. Besides leading by example, Sandra offered opportunities like forums for staff and students to share thoughts on how the college could continue to revitalize culture and language. Most importantly, students could see their identity present in their classes and everything that they did at SKC.

Jessica: What does culture mean to you? Is that present in your decision-making in and out of a work setting?

Sandra: Yes, it is in everything I do. What this means to me is hard to put into words. I did my dissertation on culture and climate in schools and cultural identity. So, the academic definition of a climate is, how it makes you feel and culture is how you do things. I think culture embodies your identity and the way you walk in the world. It's your spiritual orientation. It's your identity. It's your family connections. It's everything. It's how you see and navigate the world. It's in everything I do. It's like a compass. Every decision that you make in leadership is either aligned with your ethics and belief system, or it's not. So someone might

ask themselves, am I willing to violate my ethics? If you don't know your core values, then you can end up adrift.

Jessica: What is at the center of your core values?

Before Sandra responded, she took a minute to gather her thoughts. She had many core values that had brought her to this moment. Many of them guiding her on a daily basis. The time she took to respond to this question eluded that she has had vast experiences that have sculpted her values. She asked me to repeat the question, took some more time and responded.

Sandra: That is a hard question. Probably humility. My husband told me something early on, something that I'll never forget. It's based on his perspective. An Ojibwe perspective. We'd be driving down the road and we'd see a car that had been driven off the road. I would ask, "I wonder what happened?" He'd say, "Don't ask." There are things you don't want to know and if you ask you might find out in a way that you don't want to find out. He said, "You have to have the humility to know that not everything is for you to know." Sometimes I do want to know! He'll say, "No, you don't want to know where all the spiders are." He is right, there are some things that you don't want to know. Maybe you do want to know, but you don't need to know.

Jessica: Describe a challenge that you have encountered along your career path as a Native person.

Sandra: Yes, the hardest challenge for me is lateral oppression. Not just lateral oppression. I'll give you an example, so I was in a fellowship program at Montana State Bozeman for my master's degree and I would run into other students, and they would say, "how much Indian are you?" Because of my appearance. The

weird thing was, I didn't encounter that too much here on the reservation because people know who you are, and they know whom you're connected to. When I was working in California with various California tribes, they would ask me that. I had to think about what I was going to say. First of all, I had to understand why people would ask me that question. Primarily non-Indians asked me that because they wanted to define for themselves whether I met their definition of Indian because in mainstream society, that image, that identity, is still owned by their definition of Indian. And other Indians want to know because they want to know if you're a real one or a fraud. I started thinking about that and my answer for a long time was, "I don't think of myself as a fraction." So, I'm an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes and that's that. That was probably the hardest thing because I would have jobs where I would be working with Native students and have non-Native administrators say, "It would be great if we could get an Indian into this position." I was thinking, okay, so I don't meet your predesignated image of an Indian, therefore, you're going to define me out. Even though the Native community that I am working with doesn't have a problem. All because I don't meet that predesignated image. That was hard for me. Then on top of that, the other challenge was being a woman. I had someone, that was a boss of mine, say, "You're not like any Indian woman I ever met." I'm thinking, what does that mean? I wasn't demure and passive. My response was, "Oh, you've never met any women from my reservation then." Those have been the two most difficult challenges. They all come down to the same thing. It's to not let other people define you. That's what I've done. I know who I am and letting people

define who I am doesn't make any difference. It doesn't. It's not my problem, it's theirs. I'm just going to be the way that I am and do what I have to do. Maybe their perspectives will be broadened. I'm not going to waste a whole lot of time being hurt and derailed by that. It took a while to get there. It took a while to get there because I had two tools in my toolkit. I could cry and give up or I could get confrontational. Neither one of those are appropriate responses.

As Sandra responded to this question, I could feel the pain that she had experienced. She shifted in her chair. I quickly saw the pain turn into grit as her story continued. She had been judged, she knew she might continue to be judged, but that did not define her. This experience was something that has been paralleled for indigenous women across the country. Mankiller shared about how most people knew very little about Indigenous women. "Most people see Indigenous women as mythical icons such as Sacajawea, an intelligent, resourceful Shoshone interpreter who accompanied the Lewis and Clark expedition in the nineteenth century. This appalling lack of accurate information about Indigenous women fuels stereotypes" (Mankiller, 2011, p. 8). These stereotypes could surface in ways like lateral oppression when people had a fictional perception of how Native women should look and behave.

Jessica: How has this influenced your path as a TCP?

Sandra: It has influenced my path and my leadership style because I have the basic expectation for people around me to have respect and civility for everybody that's in this space. I want everybody to have a chance to say what they need to say and I want them all to be heard. I want them to be able to express their truth from their perspective. I don't have to agree with it, but I must acknowledge that's their experience. That's what they know. It may or may not work in every situation.

Nobody walks into any environment with a clean slate. We all bring stuff with us and we have to be able to navigate it together. The only way to do that is to be respectful of all the positions in the room. It's not my place to define anybody's identity or experience.

Jessica: How has your childhood contributed to where you are today?

Sandra: So in early childhood, my dad was in the military. I don't remember living in the Azores but we did. My brother was born there and I think I might have been two when we moved to Saint Ignatius. Then we moved to Wisconsin. When we lived in St. Ignatius, we lived next to a lot of my cousins and aunts, and uncles. So, I had an extended family orientation. When my dad got back from Greenland, we moved to Biloxi, Mississippi. While we were in Biloxi, the schools were being desegregated. So, I was there at a time when there were beaches for black people only and beaches for white people only, and restaurants where black people couldn't go to or water fountains labeled, "White only" or "Colored only." I think that probably started my sense of social justice and fight against inequality because the school that I was going to started to have its first Black children attend. When I started to make Black friends, my White friends were no longer my friends. I asked questions about it and my parents told us that's not the way it should be, but it was happening. On the drive to school, I would see buses which gave me a real sense of what was going on. At the same time, I was living on the base and my neighbors were Puerto Rican, Japanese, Black, Mexican, and White. Maybe Native Americans were living on base. I couldn't tell. So I had this multicultural environment at home but then I would go to school off of the base

and it was segregated. That was my navigation back and forth, so I learned a lot. We weren't like the normal military kids because we had a home base in St. Ignatius; a place we would go to all of the time. We weren't tumbleweeds like other military families. So, when my dad went to Vietnam, we came back to St. Ignatius, and by that time I was in the fifth grade. I went to the Ursulines. My mom had boarded there and she put us there which was interesting because Mother Superior had been there when she was there and Mother Superior was still there when I enrolled there in the fifth grade. My mother didn't have a good experience at the Ursulines Indian Boarding School, especially with Mother Superior. She's got an interesting message going to school there which was, if you can pass as White, you need to walk away from your culture and forget you're Indian. So, she had a hard time. When I went there, I had never been exposed to that kind of behavior from the nuns. My dad came back from Vietnam and then he was stationed on another base and then he was done. I think the biggest impact was the years that we were in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Trauma from Indian boarding schools has continued to have impact on Tribal communities and Indigenous women. Mankiller reminded us that women would always have an important role in their Indigenous communities.

From the time of European contact, there has been a concerted attempt to diminish the role of Indigenous women. But even with the sustained efforts by the federal government and various religious groups to totally assimilate them, women continue to play a critical role in many Indigenous communities in formal and informal leadership positions in every sector of Tribal society and the larger culture around them. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 10)

I imagine the stories that reside with Sandra's mother from her life experiences. I think about the resilience that she has modeled for Sandra.

Jessica: You got a lot of experiences understanding race, culture, and inequalities at a young age. I can see how that can shape you in different ways

Sandra: I had the opportunity to talk about things with my parents, which was nice. My mom still received the CharKoosta (CSKT Tribal Newspaper) but it was never kept out on the table. It was a form of protection because we were in the deep south at that time when it wouldn't have been safe to be anything but White even though my mom looks Tribal. It was interesting because my dad would have these drills where he would say, get in the car and shut the door. We didn't ask why. We would do these drills and practice leaving our home very quickly. There was a sense of concern when we would travel in Alabama and Mississippi. It is funny because my dad is from Kentucky. He is from a coal mining country which is why he wanted to go into the military. He didn't want to be in the coal mines.

Jessica: So how did he meet your mom?

Sandra: He was in Soap Lake, Washington, and he had a friend that was dating a girl from St. Ignatius. My dad joined his friend one weekend and met my mom. My mom said he borrowed five bucks from her and never paid her back. The rest was history.

Sandra smiled as she told the story of how her parents met. I imagined her parents still had a playful candor with each other today.

Jessica: What barriers did you encounter as you pursued your goal of becoming a TCP?

Sandra: I think I was fortunate. I had the opportunity to have a lot of really good mentors.

Being willing to take some of those early risks has helped me along my journey.

Who knew that I would do this and that and end up here. You never know. There are a lot of “what ifs.”

Jessica: Tell me about your relationships with faculty and students at your TC?

Sandra: If you have faculty that don't feel supported or they don't understand the resources available to them, sometimes you can give them things and support them, and sometimes you can't. I think the ability to work with them to understand what their limitations are is really important. I think that having that ability to connect to faculty and have discussions that are open and honest with them. That builds trust is critical. If you don't have the faculty that supports the work of the school, it is not going to happen. With the students, they have to feel cared for and supported. Sometimes they have to be redirected when they get off track. Sometimes I have to have some hard conversations, but it takes relationship-building first to allow for those conversations to take place. Faculty and staff and students all need to feel like they can approach me and talk to me about anything. It's not just working. You can't just care about somebody's job; you must care about them and their life outside of work. You don't have to know everything, but you have to acknowledge that their life exists outside of work and that they may have other things going on. It's important to be willing to try to help them meet those challenges or celebrate their personal accomplishments. It's important to build that connection. If you don't have connections and you don't have trust, you're not going to be able to take the risks. You're not going to be

able to celebrate the accomplishments. You're not going to be able to hear when you need to fix things. People have to be able to tell you those things. It can't be a group of "bobblehead" yeses. You have to be willing to hear where the problems are. Not just to hear them, but to be ready to engage in conversations about how to address those areas.

Jessica: Do you think being in both roles and one point in your life has helped you understand where your faculty and students are coming from?

Sandra: Oh, absolutely. So when faculty say, I'm overwhelmed with my twelve-credit load, I know exactly what they're talking about. I know how hard it is to fail a student. I know how hard it is to work on papers while correcting syllabi and grading student work. As an instructor and teacher, I worked on my content constantly. It is a constant thing and I understand that it isn't always an eight-hour a day job. This is a conversation I've been having with a lot of our faculty lately. I don't want to tell people you have to be here Monday through Friday from eight to four. I want to be able to say, "go teach classes, be available for your office hours, do committee work, and come to campus. How you get all that done and still be available to students is up to you." I'm not going to micromanage people. I'm also going to ask faculty to participate in building the kind of academic culture and community that they expect. So, is it okay to be a faculty member that doesn't teach their classes? Or do department Deans and Chairs need to have conversations amongst themselves to help their own faculty? I'm not going to always know what is going on in every department. I believe in a

more decentralized administrative structure where we all have responsibilities.

It doesn't have to be the administration making all of the decisions.

Jessica: A piece of that is probably hiring department Chairs and Deans that you trust to do a really good job.

Sandra: Yeah, you get the best people that you can and let them do their work. The one problematic thing about having a decentralized style is that when I get out of people's way sometimes, it's too far out of the way and I forget to check-in and sometimes they wonder, where have you been? That is one area that I reflect on. I ask myself, have I stepped too far back?" There's a balance and different people need different levels of it.

Listening to Sandra respond to this question made me think about how her trusting nature must have allowed her a lot of peace in her heart. This was similar to the perspective of Wilma Mankiller and her views on keeping a positive nature.

I learned at a fairly early age that I cannot always control the things that are sent my way or the things that other people do, but I can certainly control how I think about them and react to them. I don't spend a lot of time dwelling on the negative. I believe that having a good, peaceful mind is the basic premise for a good life. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 148)

Thinking about how Sandra might find peace in everyday decisions seemed like such a complicated undertaking. I thought about her analogy about bison and imagined her within that herd taking on each hard decision while maintaining a peaceful mind.

Jessica: Name one elder that has influenced you the most in your life. Why?

Sandra: Joe McDonald. I'll tell you the reason I think it's Joe. I learned a lot about leadership from Joe. I learned a lot about what's important and what's not

important. Anita, who has been the assistant to the president since your grandpa was there still says, “Don’t trip over the mouse turds.” You know? Don’t focus your energy on things that don’t matter, focus on what’s important. To remember that I don’t do anything, all I do is bring people together and try to break down barriers to let them do the work they need to do. Joe was this amazing bridge builder. He could bring groups of people together. That is what you have to be able to do. You have to get people to work together. You have to get people to understand what you’re doing, where you’re going, and how you’re going to get there. It’s important to remember that it’s not all your ideas. I learned that from Joe. He taught me not to forget to pray and be thankful for the things that have gone well. Most importantly, remember to laugh. I learned a lot from him about how to prioritize things. There are important things, non-important things, and this stuff in the middle. We live frequently in the middle. If you don’t when it comes time to handle the important things, you don’t have the energy to tackle them. It’s important to take care of your people. Otherwise, it doesn’t matter what great ideas you have, if you don’t have anyone left to follow you, you’re all alone.

Figure 6 shows Sandra Boham and Joe McDonald dancing in their traditional regalia at the Salish Kootenai College Powwow.

Figure 6

Sandra and Joe at Salish Kootenai College Powwow



Jessica: What do you perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide TC's?

Sandra: Being humble, having humility, and the ability to listen. Being willing to be wrong and building relationships. It is all about relationships.

Leadership skills have varied from person to person and defined the kind of leader that they might be. Sandra's ability to easily respond to this question was a symbol of her long career and vast experiences. She was able to define what skills were necessary to guide her institution. I thought of all the Indigenous women who have held leadership roles and how they embodied so

many skills. Mankiller used the narrative of a deep valley to describe how she gained her strength for her biggest undertakings.

I was once told that the most lovely and precious flowers can be seen only at the bottom of a very deep valley. I have been in that valley and seen those incredible flowers. The steep climb out of the valley made me stronger and more mature. After that, it was hard to envision what it would take to really rattle me. I am convinced that those experiences prepared me for the position of Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation and the other challenges that awaited me. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 150)

I thought about the deep valley that Sandra had found herself in throughout her life and how the flowers that she had seen might remind her of how far she has come.

Jessica: What supports do you have that have assisted you in obtaining your position as a TCP?

Sandra: Of course, I have my family and I have my mentors. Since becoming the president, I have had other Tribal College presidents who have helped me learn a lot. I have the people that work at the college. They all contribute. I learn something from everybody, almost every day.

Leadership Through Language

Sandra shared about having the opportunity to rediscover her Tribal identity later in life, after meeting her husband. This resurgence of culture and language was something that inspired every decision that she made as a TCU president. She saw herself in many of the students at SKC. Many students who also had culture and language stripped away in the Indian boarding school movement. These experiences have led Sandra to where she was today and has continued to help her focus on the importance of traditional language at SKC. As a true example of the

Indigenous practice of humility, Sandra exemplified close attention to revitalizing language.

Cajete (1994) described the cultivation of humility as:

Preparing a foundation for the students to learn the nature of attention. Attention may be considered a foundation of Indigenous learning in that almost every context from learning basic hunting and fishing skills, to memorizing the details of ritual, to listening to story, to mastering a traditional art form relied on its practiced application. Attention in the Indigenous sense has to do with the focus of all the senses. Seeing, listening, feeling, smelling, hearing, and intuiting are developed and applied in the Indigenous perspective of attention. (p. 226)

Jessica: Can you name something recently that you learned from someone at the college?

Sandra: You know, today I was in a faculty association meeting, and I learned that the faculty would like to have a more structured direction. Which is a challenge for me. I'll tell you specifically they were asking, "why do we have deans and department heads? What is the difference and what do they do?" So, I explained it and they were happy with my clarification. Then they asked me, "why didn't anyone write this down?" I realized that it never occurred to me to do that. It hasn't been written down because those leadership positions within departments are fairly new. I realized I had thought about these things and verbally shared these descriptions, with the intention that each department could take that information and synthesize it down in their own perspectives. I am realizing that not everyone does that or thinks like me. So, that was something that I learned today. I also learned today that our faculty needs permission to stop working. Things like putting their phones and computers down and that it is okay to have a

weekend and time for themselves. That it's okay to set boundaries and I think some people don't know how to do that. We have faculty that work 24/7. I'm guilty of this too. I'll be lying in bed at 11:00 at night and I'll check my email and answer sometimes. I send it thinking this faculty will look at it on Monday and they will respond right away. That shows me that they are still working too. Then they ask me well, why are you online? I asked my leadership team today, to hold on to emails and thoughts until Monday because if you email on the weekend, someone else might see the need to respond, and then both parties are working on the weekend. Don't do that to each other unless it's an emergency. It never occurred to me I would have to tell people that. I thought that people would know to not have to respond immediately after receiving an email but they don't.

Jessica: What values are most important to you in your work?

Sandra: Ethics and honesty. I hate it when people do unethical things. It's a huge violation of everybody and everything. It's important to be honest when we misstep and for people to feel comfortable enough to have those conversations when missteps happen.

I saw the emotion pass over Sandra. She clearly had a passion for her workplace to be filled with trust.

Jessica: How have your leadership skills developed over your time as a TCP?

Sandra: That is a hard one. I have probably developed my ability to/ the need to/ the appreciation of building a good team that I can trust to take care of things. I had to give up a lot of the idea that I had to do everything all the time.

Jessica: Was that hard for you?

Sandra: Yeah, because you can delegate authority but not responsibility, so you have to trust people to do things and when it doesn't go right, you have to be the one that is going to be responsible for those choices. You can't let that control you. You have to be able to say, okay. When you let others do things, maybe they don't do it right or maybe they don't do it the way you would have done and that has to be fine. If it doesn't go as well as it could have, then you just must be willing to talk through what worked and what didn't. It's important to not hold on to the things that didn't work because we are developing and growing constantly. I have some people on my leadership team that are new to their positions and they're going to make missteps along the way. We all do. It has to be okay because if it's not, then they're not going to be willing to try to do new things. My leadership style is a matter of supporting them and knowing when to step back or step in. I've had to learn that balance. It's not easy and I still get it wrong on occasion. I sometimes don't step in when I should, sooner. Sometimes, I'm hoping they'll say that they need help, but people don't always ask for help.

Jessica: How have lessons from your Tribal community guided your leadership as a TCP?

Sandra: So, I first became the president and started reaching out to the community. I received a pretty good talking to because the college had drifted away from the community for a little bit. I received an earful from our Tribal community about the need for the college to maintain and nurture the relationships that we have with the departments, culture committees, and schools. I had a discussion with the

Salish culture committee when I first started and used the analogy of marriage. I said, “We’ve been married for forty years but somehow for about six of them we disconnected. We took each other for granted. We didn’t keep in touch. We just figured you’d always be there. We drifted pretty far apart, so it took work to re-establish that we still like each other, we still want to work together, and we still want to be partners. It took a while to get back to where we both felt valued. The community was pretty loud about how they feel about the college and the role that it serves and the support that they want to give it. They are not happy when we misstep or when somebody in the community is saying mean things about SKC. They want to know the truth. They are all invested in our college probably more than any other entity on the reservation.

A community-based approach has been a very important part of the Tribal college community. Native communities have survived so much together and together they have continued to survive and strive. Mankiller reminded us that there was so much to be grateful for when coming from such a resilient community. “How can I be anything but positive when I come from a tenacious, resilient people who keep moving forward with an eye toward the future even after enduring unspeakable hardship?” (Mankiller, 2011, p. 148). I thought about the Tribal community that supported SKC and all of the new endeavors that they sought to achieve. This community relationship was so important and clearly a top priority to Sandra.

Jessica: So, the community has taught you the importance of nurturing the relationship?

Sandra: Yes, maintaining them, nurturing them, and not taking them for granted. They have taught me about how this college sits in the hearts and minds of our community. When I first started as the president, I learned that the relationship

was not there like it had been with Joe when he retired in 2010. It was strained and broken. So yeah, I got to hear all about it and the clean-up work began but, it was okay; it was good.

Jessica: Did you grow up on your home reservation? If yes, what was it like? How is it different now?

Sandra took a sip from her drink. She looked out the window and smiled. I Thought about her imagining dirt roads, pedal bikes, corner stores, and swimming in the local watering hole. These experiences were still possible to kids living on the reservation today, but there have certainly been cultural and technological shifts since her childhood.

Sandra: When I grew up in Mission, we had dirt roads, and everybody rode their bikes everywhere. The whole community yelled at each other's kids. We would go swimming at Mission Creek or Mission Dam. We would ride our bikes up there. We had the street light rule; when the lights weren't on, you had to be home. We slept in sleeping bags, in our yards. There was a movie house in Mission that we could go to on the weekend. Pretty much everybody knew everybody. Teachers didn't leave. The teachers at the school were the same teachers from when my mom was in school. Now it's the kids of the kids that I went to high school with that are teaching in the schools. Now, I would say that most people don't know who their neighbors are. They don't dare let their second or third graders ride their bikes around town. They don't let kids sleep in their yards alone anymore. People today are more isolated which is sad.

Jessica: It sounds like there has been a definite culture shift

Sandra: Yeah, a huge culture shift. My mom still lives in Mission. I only know the people that live across the street from her. Besides that, I don't know anyone else that lives around her. They are all new people. I think this shift has changed the community. People cannot correct other people's kids like it was when I was a kid. If someone talks to someone's kids today, it becomes a huge deal. This adds to the pressures on families because when I was a kid, my parents felt like it was safe. After all, we had all kinds of community member eyes on us and they weren't afraid to correct us or talk to our parents if we were doing something dangerous. That is not where our community is today.

Jessica: How were you personally impacted by your local TC growing up and how did this impact your path of becoming a TCP?

Sandra: I was a junior in high school in 1977 and that is when I took my first night class from Salish Kootenai College. My instructor was Joanne Dixon. The classes that I took during my junior and senior years were an introduction to psychology, an introduction to sociology, and a Native American studies class. I had done a ton of research trying to decide if I was going to go to college and my mom said, "You are going to college." She was working in Tribal Social Services at the time and she needed to get her degree. So she signed up for these night classes at SKC and told me that I could go with her. I ended up loving the night classes at SKC. The deal that I made with my mom was, if I maintained good grades in my high school classes, I could continue to go to these night classes with her at SKC. I did maintain my grades so that I could do the night classes. When it came time for me to decide where I wanted to go to college, I chose the University of Montana

because they had a campus. At that time, SKC was just a couple of buildings. It isn't what it is today. I had gone to the University of Montana during my senior year for an all-Indian speech and debate tournament, so it was the only college campus that I had spent time on. I graduated high school in 1978 and in January 1979, I started GED classes at SKC. So, I was going to college in Missoula and teaching adult education classes at SKC during the evenings of my freshman year. I paid my way through college by teaching these GED courses four nights a week and working at my grandma's bar on the weekends. I saw the need for classes in our area and I had a really hard time with Mission Schools playing favorites when I was in school. If you came from a prominent family, you were treated differently. I wanted to set out and change that, so that no matter where you come from, you can be successful in an education setting.

In my interview with Sandra, some themes emerged. She spoke about humility, honesty, and trust. I saw each of these exemplified in her interview and actions with colleagues, fellow administrators, and students. There were times when she was asked tough questions and had to think about how to answer questions honestly with humility. I had the opportunity to observe Sandra being interviewed by Yellowstone Public Radio. One of the questions that the journalist asked Sandra was, Why they would use a synthetic cadaver in SKC's medical programs? Sandra explained that this life-like cadaver was an opportunity for SKC's Native students to still pursue medical fields while not being forced to choose between their cultural values and their profession because, in many Indigenous communities, it was inappropriate to work with dead bodies. In many Tribal communities, a corpse was considered sacred. Questions like these were opportunities for Sandra to be a bridge for SKC's practices with the rest of the world. A

confounding responsibility. She regularly responded with a great deal of humility and honesty. Something that involved taking time to think about her response before she spoke. These opportunities to share SKC's practices with the world with honesty were how she has retained and continued to grow trust within her community.

Joe McDonald

Today I am traveling to meet Karla Bird at Blackfeet Community College. I asked my grandpa Joe to join me on the drive as he has been the inspiration behind this dissertation. It was nice to hear his stories during the 3-hour drive to Browning, Montana. I found myself taking more time to listen to his stories as he turned 89 this year and I knew my earth-time with him was precious.

As I pulled into my grandpa's house, I saw him waiting by the door. He proceeded to my car with a lunchbox in hand. During our 3-hour drive, grandpa's snacks quickly came in handy. It had been a little over a year since we lost my grandma and I could see the lasting impact that 67 years could have on someone. I knew that my grandma made sure to send him with a snack on a long drive. His resilience in my grandma's death reminded me of the delicateness of life. We turned on Highway 93 going north and I started to think about grandpa Joe's longstanding education career.

Outstanding Indian Athlete and Educator

Joe McDonald was born at Holy Family hospital in St. Ignatius Montana on March, 31, 1933. He was the firstborn of Isabelle VanWert and Edward McDonald.

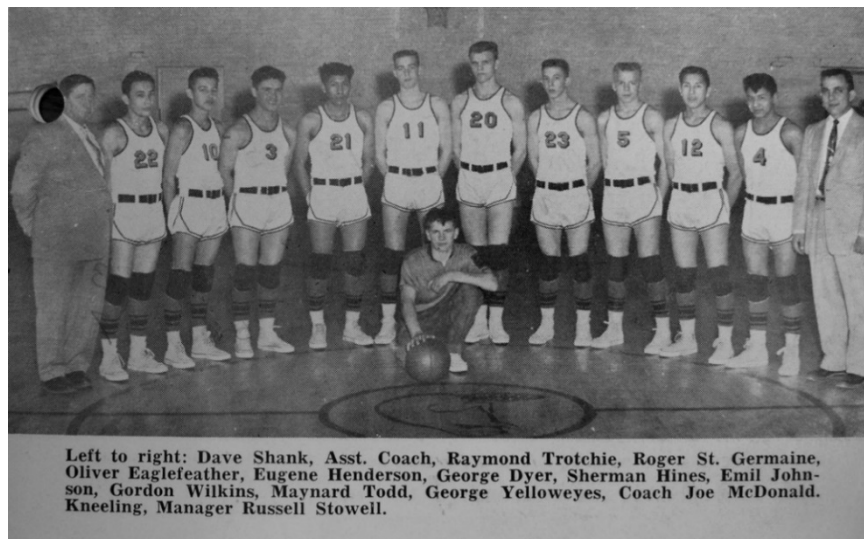
I am what you would call a Haskell baby. Both of my parents were sent to Lawrence, Kansas to attend Haskell Indian boarding school. My mom was from the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota and my father was from the Flathead Indian Reservation in

Montana. They met, fell in love, and moved back to live on our family land in St. Ignatius before I was born.

Joe grew up in Dixon, Montana, while his mother Isabelle worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs-Flathead Agency. The agency was established in 1894 and was located near the junction of the Flathead and Jocko Rivers in Western Montana. Joe proved to be athletically inclined. He led the Saint Ignatius Bulldogs to a state football championship as a sophomore quarterback and earned a college scholarship to play basketball. Joe accepted a full-ride basketball and football scholarship to the University of Montana-Western. Joe earned his teaching degree and over the next 2 decades traveled around the state of Montana teaching and coaching in addition to pursuing his bachelor's, master's, and eventually his doctorate from the University of Montana. His teaching and coaching brought Joe to various Montana towns such as Oilmont, Plevna, Missoula, Miles City, Hamilton, Havre, and Ronan. Joe's coaching earned him an induction into the Montana Indian Athletic Hall of Fame in 2008.

The most talented player that I have ever coached was George Yelloweyes. He was ambidextrous and well-coordinated. He could beat anyone off of the dribble going left or right and was an incredible shooter. He went to Miles City Community College to play basketball. He was eighty percent from the free throws line. While he was in college, he was fighting fires one summer and hurt both legs. After that, he couldn't run or play on them anymore.

Figure 7 shows Joe McDonald in a team picture during his time as the State School Beavers boys' basketball head coach.

Figure 7*1958 State School Beavers*

Note. George Yelloweyes (#4) and Coach McDonald (far right).

Salish Kootenai College was founded in 1976 with the help and direction of Joe's leadership. This leadership was gained over 20 years of coaching and teaching across the state of Montana. He served as president of SKC from its founding in 1976 to 2010. Joe pushed SKC forward to the place that it stands today. In 1981 SKC became self-governing. It had previously been a branch of the Flathead Valley Community College.

In addition to holding numerous honorary doctorate degrees, he was a Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal councilman. He has received awards from the Carnegie Foundation, the Montana governor, the Montana Armature Athletic Union, and the National Indian Education Association. He was named by the University of Montana Foundation as one of the "Fifty Greatest Grizzlies." Figure 8 shows Joe dancing in his traditional regalia the Arlee Powwow.

Figure 8

Joe at the Arlee Powwow, 2019



Joe Today

Joe has still served as the president emeritus with an office at SKC and has full access to everything at the college. He served on the Salish Kootenai College Foundation, the Fort Connah Restoration Society, the National Board of American Indian Business Leaders, and the Ronan Telephone Holding Company. He currently edits historical documents from the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai tribes and has published five documentary books with SKC librarian emeritus, Robert Bigart.

An excerpt of our road trip to Browning is as follows:

Jessica: I haven't visited Browning much. I bet you have spent a lot of time on this road.

Joe: Yes, especially when your mom and dad lived and taught in Browning. It was their second teaching experience, and they did really well with the Blackfeet students.

Your dad brought a boys basketball team from a losing season to a state championship. That is pretty commendable. Your dad was a pretty fantastic coach.

Jessica: Browning always seems to have pretty dominant basketball teams.

Joe: Yes, that is because those Blackfoot kids come from fierce warriors. Historically, the Blackfeet would come over to our neck of the woods in war parties and dominate the Flathead's. They were especially dominating because they were the only tribe in our area that gained access to guns. Around 1775, they gained access to guns through the Hudson Bay Company in Canada which led to an uneven power struggle with our tribes. You should really read the book that I've edited. It talks about the timeline of all of that.

Jessica: Tell me about the Blackfeet Reservation.

Joe: Well of course in our world, you should ask someone who is Blackfeet and from Browning, but I can tell you what I know. It is different from our rez in that they have a much larger Tribal community living in Browning. They have the largest Indian population in Montana. They didn't open their reservation for homesteading as they did with ours which allowed many more White settlers to move in and homestead. In 1904, congress passed the Flathead Allotment Act, and almost overnight, over 60% of our reservation land was gone. Which led to an insurgence of Western (White) influence in both our community and reservation institutions.

Jessica: Wow

Joe: Yes, we had a fearless Chief. His name was Chief Charlo. He did everything he could to stop the Allotment Act from happening. He even traveled all the way to DC to talk to the president to stop it. Could you imagine going all the way from Montana to Washington, DC in the early 1900s? The government did a lot of things to try and control our Tribal communities during that time. They didn't want our people to live off of the land anymore and assimilate, so they killed off all of the buffalo.

The road to Browning was clear of snow and Highway US-2 took us around the west side of Glacier National Park (GNP). I was in awe of the beauty. Towering mountains surround us as we wound around the west side of GNP. I thought about the stories that these mountains held. I imagined Tribal encampments along the Middle Fork Flathead River. I thought about our land when it belonged to Indigenous people, the rightful owners.

Jessica: Have you met Karla Bird?

Joe: I have not had the pleasure of meeting her yet. I know a lot of Bird's, as there are a lot of Bird's in Browning so I am sure that I know some of her relatives. She sounds like she is doing a lot of great things at BCC. I know Carol Murray who is currently serving as the Vice President of BCC. She was at BCC when I was the president. She is a pretty incredible woman. She is very traditional and speaks fluent Blackfoot. She's a very soft-spoken lady. I have a deep respect for Carol.

We pulled into Browning and I could see the campus of BCC. My grandfather pointed out the first building that housed the first classes at BCC. We drove on and saw the many buildings that make up the campus today. We walked in and were greeted at the front doors. The woman shared what a pleasure it was to see Joe. She shared that she was a student and obtained

her degree at SKC. She took his jacket. This treatment illuminated the reputation of Joe McDonald that has lived in all Tribal colleges in the state of Montana. Karla greeted us and invited us to sit down as she began presenting the agenda for the Days of the Piikani. Before she started, she announced that we had a Joe McDonald visiting today and she invited him up to share about Tribal colleges. Joe happily obliged. Figure 9 shows Joe speaking at Blackfeet Community College during the Days of the Piikani.

Figure 9

Joe McDonald speaks at Days of The Piikani, 2021



Blackfeet Community College

During my observation, Blackfeet Community College celebrated the Days of the Piikani. Piikani was the traditional name for the Blackfoot/Blackfeet people. People of the Blackfoot Nation also referred to themselves as Niitsitapi, meaning “the real people” (Dempsey, 2010).

The Blackfoot Confederacy included four bands: Amskapi Piikani (Blackfeet Nation), Piikani Nation (Pegian), Siksika (Blackfoot), and Kainaiwa (Blood Tribe). Traditionally, the southern Piikani lived in Montana and the Northern Piikani lived in Alberta, Canada. Today, most Piikani people live on the Piikani First Nation in Alberta and the Blackfeet Nation in Montana (“Piikani Nation Culture and History”, n.d.). During this 2-day celebration, BCC brought in speakers, presented work done in the Piikani culture, and fed the community and staff at BCC. During my visit, I was witness to Arlan and Taylan Edwards as they sang the Honor/Chief song for Earl Old Person and watched *Dogwood* an Indigenous matriarch-led revenge story that was written and directed by Browning, Montana, native and current UCLA School of Theatre graduate, Maya Rose Dittloff. Figure 10 shows the posters that were used to advertise the Days of The Piikani.

Figure 10

Days of the Piikani Flyer



This year’s celebration honored Chief Earl Old Person who passed away on October, 13, 2021, at the age of 92. Earl served as the Chief of the Blackfeet Nation for 70 years, making him

the longest-serving elected Tribal leader in the country (Risen, 2021). As the day went on, I could feel the admiration and heartbreak from attendees at BCC as they took time to share and speak about all of Earl Old Person's accomplishments for Blackfeet people and American Indian people collectively.

The day was opened by a prayer in the Blackfeet language by BCC Vice President, Carol Murray. Draped in a traditional women's shawl, Carol opened her prayer whilst smudging the room. Smudging has different purposes, meanings and techniques depending on the tribe.

Lapier (2016) defined Blackfeet Smudging as,

A process of burning dried plants or other natural elements and using the smoke to cleanse themselves, objects, or places. In this process, the person places both hands over the smoke, takes the some within their hands and beginning with the head, moves downward, and washes the entire body with smoke. (p. 16)

This process can be used for more than just cleansing. Lapier (2016) stated that smudging could prepare a person to communicate with the supernatural and could help humans transcend into the supernatural realm. Figure 11 shows Carol Murray saying the opening prayer for the Days of The Piikani.

Figure 11

Carol Murray

**Stepping Out of Education**

Blackfeet Community College took the bold approach of requiring each person that worked or attended BCC to be vaccinated. An effort that was emulated throughout reservations across the United States to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to requiring vaccinations, BCC forgave outstanding debt for anyone who had attended BCC. For some, this gave students a clean financial slate and, for others, it was the opportunity of a second chance to finish their degree. In response to the question, Tell me about your relationships with faculty and students at your TC?, President Karla Bird responded:

All of the money that we received for COVID-19 support has been put towards our students. The initiative that I try to promote is not only culture and language, but also student-centered perspective. An example of that is that we forgave all student debt this year. It ties in with persistence because we forgave student debt for students that weren't successful at BCC as well as those that were successful. This gave those students that weren't successful the opportunity to persist and go back to school if they wanted to. When you look at the American Indian literature on persistence, it says that we shouldn't talk about dropping out as a failure. Instead, we should talk about it as stepping out of higher education and it's okay to step back in at any point. The message that we wanted to send students after we forgave their debt, was for them to see and feel that they had the chance to come back with a second chance. The fall after we forgave student debt, we had 128 come back debt-free. We also did fifty percent off of tuition and we purchased 500 laptops. We know in this community, sometimes students don't have money to buy laptops for online education. That is what makes Tribal colleges so special. We go a step beyond because these are our people and this is about building capacity in this community. The more access we provide, it can improve their quality of life but it contributes to our community and local society.

This effort by Dr. Bird and the rest of BCC aligned with their core value of access. Many students attending BCC had the chance to find access to college without the burden of college debt and with a new laptop. According to the BCC website, the core themes guiding the college were access, achievement in higher education, meaningful employment, basic skills, continuing education, and integrating Blackfeet culture and language (Blackfeet Community College, n.d.).

The fall of 2021 looked different for BCC with masking requirements and vaccination requirements, but they maintained a high number of student enrollment. Currently, student enrollment at BCC was in the range of 300-500 students. Figure 12 shows Karla's office, which was representative of her reflective nature, featuring a blackboard and table where she invited colleagues in to brainstorm presidential decisions.

Figure 12

Karla's Office



Dr. Karla Bird

Karla was wearing a colorful ribbon skirt. Allaire (2021) stated that many Indigenous tribes utilized ribbon work in their designs, often for pow-wow regalia or pieces made for special occasions. Today was the Day of Piikani, a celebration that honored the heritage of Karla's ancestors. This was the same heritage of many of her students, staff, and faculty who identified as being Piikani. At the center of Karla's educational vision was traditional language and culture and it was evident in her choice to wear a ribbon skirt today. The skirt, inclusive of every color, was representative of Karla's many beautiful traits, open to new possibilities, a world at her fingertips, Creator guiding every delicate step of leadership. Figure 13 shows Karla standing in her office.

Figure 13*Karla Bird*

The Stories Ribbon Skirts Hold

Ribbon skirts hold an array of meanings and purposes. To some tribes, ribbon skirts could be seen as a symbol of womanhood and adaptation. The skirts were seen as sacred and spiritual and held centuries of stories in each stitch. To Karla, stories and her culture were at the center of everything she did and her spiritual connection to the Creator and the spirit world was her foundation. When asked what supports have assisted her to where she was today, she responded,

First and foremost, my walk with the Creator. I have this profound belief that there is a path for me and it will be guided by the Creator. My family. Even though my parents have both now passed away, I still really depend on their support through a spiritual aspect.

When asked about how lessons from her Tribal community had guided her leadership, Karla responded,

The culture and the language have guided me. It is so powerful. The lesson is that you'll never go wrong as long as you have the culture and the language and the foundation. It will always be the right choice at the right time as long as you have culture and language as the foundation of everything that you do. The community will always support it even if they don't have the resources to do so.

Karla saw the world through a lens without fear because she trusted that it was the ultimate plan of the Creator. This lens allowed Karla to make decisions holistically without reservation.

Dr. Bird's Background

Growing up in Browning, Montana, Karla's mother and grandmother instilled the importance of education, culture, and language. These things would find themselves at the

forefront of her work as she began her career. Karla did not strive to be a teacher, instead, she had ambitions to work in paleontology. When responding to the interview question: Thinking back to your childhood days, what was a career dream of yours?

I loved paleontology because I had a scientific mind. So, I loved the sciences. I loved the ecosystem and learning about all of the different species. I loved the dinosaur era. I recently created a Blackfoot ecological class where I designed the whole class and picked the presenters and worked with them to develop their content. Part of the motivation behind the class is my passion for ecology. This class is imperative but it's also a fun project for me. This is a project I hold dear to my heart because I think it's important for us to know our ecological system and to challenge western academics, to notice the different worldviews, and most importantly, to honor our worldview. Indigenous education is my passion, and we have lower representation in sciences. Sometimes I think back about how maybe I would've pursued a career in the sciences if someone would've guided or mentored me throughout my childhood in education.

After high school, Karla attended the University of Montana to begin her undergraduate journey. Karla studied psychology with an emphasis in research and a minor in Native American Studies. Throughout her undergraduate degree, Karla worked in a psychology lab where she helped transcribe data for a Ph.D. candidate. Karla's first job out of her undergraduate degree was in a crisis management unit. In this unit, people could seek help if they were in a crisis event, such as suicide. Karla decided to pursue a master's in psychology but found herself in a complex situation where she did not feel comfortable quantifying people.

I didn't want to quantify people and I didn't want to assess people. I didn't want to quantify a human person on paper" It is a lot of diagnosing and assessing some lower-level disabilities. Which I was not comfortable with, especially because I felt like the metrics didn't fit American Indian people.

Karla stepped out of the master's in the school psychology program and went into the counselor education master's program. Throughout her counselor education degree, Karla was a therapeutic aide, rehabilitative aid, case manager, and crisis manager. With a strong desire to work in mental health, Karla's counseling program was the perfect fit because it did not involve quantifying individuals. After obtaining that degree, Karla became an elementary school counselor. While Karla was a school counselor, she applied to the University of Montana's Ed.D. in educational leadership. It has brought Karla to where she was today, but if she could do it again, she would.

When I think back on this, I think about how I was a first-generation graduate school student at the doctoral level and I didn't have a lot of support or guidance in the application process. One example is that I only applied to one Ed.D. program and I had decided that I would make it or not and if I didn't make it, I thought I would just move on as a school counselor. It was so Black and White and all of my hopes and dreams were on this one program. I think that is what we do as first-generation college students or maybe as Native people. It is something that I think about in this job. I remind our students and my colleagues that they are the consumer and shopping for the educational program, it's not the other way around. When I applied for my Ed.D. I was thinking, if I am good enough for this program, I will get in and if I'm not, then I will continue to be a school counselor.

I realized how limited I was in understanding the process. If I were to apply knowing what I know now, I would think about it from a consumer perspective shopping around for a program that is the right fit for me. That means that they would need to have certain standards in place and classes and curricula that are specific to American Indian people. If I had the chance to do it again, I would've applied to several Ed.D. programs.

Shortly after Karla obtained her doctorate, she was hired as Blackfeet Community College president. Her name written in big letters across her door symbolized the transparent approach that Karla took in leadership, inviting newcomers, students, and staff to know exactly where her office was located. Figure 14 shows Karla's office door.

Figure 14

Karla's Office Door



President Bird

Karla has been leading Blackfeet Community College since 2019. Part of her role as president has allows her to create policies and procedures to guide the operation and effectiveness of Blackfeet Community College. She has overseen the development and integration of Blackfeet Ways of Knowing into curricula, student supports, and facilities. All of Karla's decisions involved her partnership with the Board of Directors. Karla was the cornerstone of the college and hires, supervises, and valuates staff and faculty. At the center of everything that Karla did was her focus on Indigenous culture and language. When asked the interview question, Why are Tribal colleges important? Karla responded,

The whole purpose of my degree was so I could work at a Tribal college because I believe in Tribal-Centered education. I was willing to work in any area just to be at BCC. Only Native people know what Native people need and Native people should be the ones designing curricula for other Native people. Role modeling is so important and Native students need to see themselves in the instructors and leaders at Tribal colleges. So many people worked toward finding funding for Tribal colleges at the national level. When I look around and see what has already been built, it makes me realize that so many people have come before me to make sure that our students and our community have a place to learn. They provide education to Tribal communities in remote areas. They also provide culturally specific degree opportunities like our Piikani studies degree. That is important because it preserves our pathway and community. They are important for employment on reservations and having our own people lead our Tribal colleges in these efforts.

Tribal College Leadership and Multicultural Education

In many forms of public-school curriculum, minority groups have not been given unique and particular attention which was what was required in closing the education gap for students of color today. Banks & Banks (2015) stated that mainstream-centric curriculum had negative consequences for mainstream students because it reinforces their false sense of superiority, gave them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denied them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge and perspectives that could be gained from studying and experience other cultures and groups. For institutions to meet the needs of their diverse populations, teachers must integrate multicultural content through four approaches: The Contributions Approach, the Additive Approach, the Transformational Approach, and the Social Action Approach.

The Contributions Approach

The contributions approach (Banks & Banks, 2015) argued that this was one of the most frequently used and was often used extensively when a school or district first attempted to integrate ethnic and multicultural content into the mainstream curriculum. This approach was seen when educators inserted ethnic heroes and discrete cultural artifacts into the curriculum and curriculum language. In the contributions approach, students at BCC had the opportunity to see and interact with Indigenous visuals and language daily. Karla shared that one of her main focuses in language was the Indigenous focus of persistence when students “step out” of education. Karla noted that the common term in Western curriculum was “drop out” and by simply rephrasing this term, we connected to American Indian literature.

When you look at the American Indian literature on persistence, it says that we shouldn't talk about dropping out as a failure. Instead, we should talk about it as stepping out of higher education, and it's okay to step back in at any point.

The Additive Approach

Banks & Banks (2015) described the additive approach as the integration of ethnic content into the curriculum with the addition of concepts, content, themes, and perspectives. In the additive approach, BCC offered traditional nursing classes to obtain a bachelor's in nursing with integrations of Indigenous perspectives. Nursing required a deep understanding of what it meant to care for the sick or people experiencing extreme health predicaments. It was a field that required understanding of death and life that could be very hard to experience. In an Indigenous approach, it was important to recognize trauma so that, when it was experienced in a job setting, students would know how to work through it. Cajete (1994) stated that,

From the Indigenous perspective, true learning and gaining significant knowledge does not come without sacrifice and at times a deep wound. Indigenous teachers realize that only by experiencing extreme hardship and trauma are some individuals ready to reach their maximum level of learning development. The ritual incorporation of life's hardships into such ceremonies can transform the reality of woundedness into a context for learning and reflection. In this way, the wound or traumatic life-event is mobilized to serve as a constant reminder of an important teaching. As long as the wound or the repercussions of an event are used to symbolize something deeply important to know and understand, they provide a powerful source for renewal, insight, and the expansion of individual consciousness. (p. 226)

In this sense, we acknowledged that indigenous communities have experienced trauma and when trauma was acknowledged, it could serve as adapted consciousness in every career.

Transformation Approach

Banks (1989) defined the transformation approach as students being able to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic perspectives. A core value that was present in each course at BCC was culture. In a transformation approach, students were taught courses through an Indigenous lens. After obtaining a degree from BCC, students would have the opportunity to go back into their Tribal community to directly meet the needs of their communities. When talking about this factor in her college, Karla stated,

The more access we provide, the more it can improve the quality of life, and contribute to our community, and local society. We have students that will become superintendents, police officers, doctors, and community members on our reservation. So, we must teach them in Indigenous ways.

Social Action Approach

Part of BCC's action approach was to require every student take the Piikani language as a way to continue revitalizing and sustaining the traditional language. The social action approach (Banks, 1989) stated that this approach added components that required students to make decisions and take actions related to the concept, issue, or problem studied. At BCC, there was no course substitute for the Piikani language unless a student had passed a Native language course at another institution.

Observing Karla in AIHEC meetings, BCC course building meetings and staff meetings, Karla's heart for language and culture was undoubtedly at the center of her work. Our interview transcript is as follows:

Jessica: Tell me about yourself and how you got here.

Karla grinned as she began to tell her life story. She was full of joy and excitement. I imagined her thinking about her family and the house that she grew up in, not far from where we were having this conversation. She smiled and responded.

Karla: So, there are five kids in my family. I am the youngest. I had a family member that was diagnosed with schizophrenia. So, growing up I had to learn a lot about mental illness and learn how we could support them. This family member is very high functioning for that diagnosis. A lot of it is because of the built-in support that my parents provided. They are very high functioning in the sense that they go to their own doctor's appointments, pay their bills, drives, and cooks. They were my inspiration because I wanted to learn how to better support my them and other populations that struggle with mental illness or mental wellness. So, I pursued a bachelor's in psychology and a master's in counseling from the University of Montana. If education wouldn't have been the path, I would've pursued counseling or clinical psychology.

Jessica: I bet having a background in psychology and counseling lends itself well in this position.

Karla: Yes, the counseling skills do. Communication is the key. Communication resolves so much. I remember my relatives saying, counseling is a big part of the president's job. I would say, no it's not. But it is.

Jessica: What are the characteristics of career paths that you followed in your journey to becoming a TCP?

Karla took a minute to gather her thoughts. I imagined her thinking about all of the hours that she had poured into her own education and all of the people that she had helped. I began to ponder; how many lives had she saved? I thought about all of the lives she had impacted by working in mental health. She smiled and responded.

Karla: When I was in high school, I took a psychology class and it was so fascinating that I would read the textbook for fun. I can't say that I have done that for any other field. When I arrived at the University of Montana, I declared my major as psychology with an emphasis on research. I also did a minor in Native American Studies. So even at an undergraduate level, I was involved in research. At the time, I was working in the lab with this gentleman who was earning his Ph.D. in psychology. His study focus was American Indian grief. So my job was to help him transcribe his data. I knew that as soon as I started my psychology coursework that that was where I wanted to be because I didn't at any point switch my major. After I finished my bachelor's, I took a year off school and worked in a crisis management unit. It was a center for individuals that were experiencing a crisis. Sometimes, they were suicidal, or they weren't taking medication. This unit was a tier below hospitalization. The purpose of this unit was to be an intervention to prevent hospitalization, if possible. People would stay at this center anywhere from two to twelve days until they were stabilized and could return home. It is similar to what you would see at Pathways, but it is not a hospital. I had some great experiences there, but it was difficult to work. For my master's, I enrolled in school psychology. It was there that I found a complex of not wanting to quantify people. "I didn't want to quantify people and I didn't

want to assess people. I didn't want to quantify a human person on paper" It is a lot of diagnosing and assessing some lower-level disabilities. Which I was not comfortable with, especially because I felt like the metrics didn't fit American Indian people. I ended up stepping out of that program and went into the crisis management program. I worked in a lot of areas in mental health. I was a therapeutic aid, rehabilitative aid, case manager, and crisis manager. I know that I wanted to work in mental health, so I found this counseling program and it was the perfect fit because it wasn't about quantifying individuals, instead, it was supporting them without putting labels on them. It was supporting whatever their path was and helping them develop skills that they needed to navigate life. So, after I obtained that degree, I became an elementary school counselor. While I was a school counselor, I applied for my doctorate. At the time, I thought I would be able to do it online and work as an elementary counselor. After I applied and was accepted into The University of Montana's Ed.D. in educational leadership. When I think back on this, I think about how I was a first-generation graduate school student at the doctoral level, and I didn't have a lot of support or guidance in the application process. When I applied for my Ed.D. I was thinking, if I am good enough for this program, I will get in and if I'm not, then I will continue to be a school counselor. I realized how limited I was in understanding the process. If I were to apply knowing what I know now, I would think about it from a consumer perspective shopping around for a program that is the right fit for me. That means that they would need to have certain standards in place and classes and curricula that are specific to American Indian people. If I had the chance to do

it again, I would've applied to several EdD programs. I had faith and prayed a lot. So, I know I ended up right where I needed to be. I believe that Creator is guiding me and guiding all of us. I prayed to the Creator and asked him to help me with these three things if a Doctorate is a right path for me. The first one was, to get out of my school counseling contract, a place to live in Missoula, and some way to afford the Ed.D. program. All in one week, all three things happened. When I went to my supervisor at the school, I was teaching at, he told me that I needed to pursue my education and let me out of my contract. That same week I went to Missoula to register for my classes and while I was there, I saw one of my friends. She told me that her co-worker was looking for a roommate and that she would introduce us. I met up with her, looked at the place, and moved in. At the end of the week, the educational leadership department called me and told me about a research assistant position that they had advertised and hired someone, but that person did not come in, so they offered it to me. I took it and for working twenty hours a week, I got seven hundred every two weeks and fourteen hundred every month. Which was good for being in college. I know it sounds drastic, but it came down to having faith that everything was going to work out if the Creator wanted it to.

Prayer to the Creator was an essential piece of cultural practice since the beginning of time for Tribal communities. It was also something that Mankiller relied on throughout her lifetime.

I willed myself to remain spiritually strong through prayer, meditation, and relaxation exercises. Once I was able to return to my home in Mankiller Flats, surrounded by the

land that I love, the first thing I did was walk to the freshwater spring of my childhood, sit in my usual spot facing east, and say a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving that I was able to come full circle to this special place where my life began. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 154)

I thought about Karla and how she had come full circle back to her home reservation where her story began, giving others the opportunity to start their educational stories.

Jessica: Did your childhood dreams influence your path in becoming a TCP?

Karla: Yes, I was interested in the sciences as a kid and the ecosystem. I think more specifically, I was more focused on the holistic perspective than anything else. I remember absorbing information about how the ecosystem functions and how we are reliant and dependent on one another. When we think about all of these systems in our world and how they all come together to align, I think about how amazing that is. With my passion for ecology, I feel like I am getting to live out my childhood dream as a president by having the opportunity to facilitate ecological classes here at our TC.

Leadership Through Caring

As I listened to Karla's responses, I thought about how she had learned the values of care from her family as they continued to emerge in almost all of her responses. The care resonated through the Indigenous practice of being encouraged to explore outside as a child. Cajete (1994) illuminated Indigenous practice as creative dreaming, art, ritual, and ceremony helped the student externalize inner thoughts and qualities for examination. Such practices helped students to establish a connection with their real selves and learn how to bring their inner resources to bear in their lives. Helping students gain access to their real selves was part of the transformative education that was inherent in Indigenous teaching. In this sense, Karla's explorative childhood

allowed her to find connections with her real self as decisions came to fruition in her leadership. Her connection to her Tribal Ecology was present in her decisions today such as spearheading the Elder webinar class that allowed for oral-storytelling. An endeavor that reached hundreds of people over Zoom during the pandemic.

Jessica: How did your culture influence your path to becoming a TCP?

Karla: I have always had a strong foundational identity as being Blackfeet. That identity was so strong because when my mom raised us, she told us so many oral stories about who our grandparents and our great-aunts and great-uncles were and about what it was like to live back then. My uncle Darryl BlackMan helped with the medicine lodge. My mom told many stories about Darryl BlackMan. She told us stories about my grandmother and how every morning when the sun came up, she would pray. She told us stories about how Darryl would dry his plants, herbs, and berries for the winter months. I had this rich identity through oral stories for our genealogy and cultural values. My mom would share about traditional values and how my grandparents would practice those values. Some examples are kindness and generosity. Many of our values are not transparent to western values. When I spent eleven years at the University of Montana in college, I knew that I was operating in a different culture and society, but I didn't realize the true impact that it had on me and my thinking until I came back to the reservation that I realized, I just spend eleven years getting trained on how to think like a western academic scholar. I was paying money to do western-focused research and to think and quantify in ways that were not traditional to my culture. I think deep down I knew about the disconnect because there were things that we would talk about in class

that just didn't resonate with me. Everything that I learned about Indigenous education I learned on my own and not in a classroom. At home, I would read about all these Indigenous researchers and that was different from what I was learning in the classroom. When I became the president at BCC, I pushed the culture and the language, and I am invested in that so that students have access. From my research, we know that identity is imperative for student success, and I think it only takes a Native researcher to nail that down. Coming back to BCC made me feel right at home in the sense that my thought process is finally in alignment which is something I never experienced in my own college experience. I now finally have the chance to feel the collective thought process of fellow Blackfeet thinkers. I also do an Elders webinar with a focus on storytelling. I have four Blackfeet speakers and for the next webinar, they are focusing on the rare stories. So the ones that are maybe endangered. It's not the ones that we commonly know or ones that are written in books, these are on the cusp of losing. I am fortunate to have my education, but I look back and think, how sad it is that I spent eleven years of my life displaced in an education setting and not knowing the profound effect of that until I came back home. All of those years, I could've been pursuing what it is like to be Blackfeet. We often talk about the relocation of tribes and displacement from a historical perspective, but displacement still happens today, and it happened to me through education.

I could feel Karla's pain in this response. Her gaze shifted and her tone changed. This experience of displacement was clearly something that still lived with her today. I think about her students and how some of them may have found their way back to BCC after feeling

displaced at other institutions, similar to Karla. I imagined how proud she was to work in a place where her students could feel grounded and connected to their college experience through cultural focus and language revitalization. Mankiller reminded us that Tribal entities like TCUs were the result of survival for Native communities.

After several hundreds of years of sustained opposition to the continuation of our government and our unique lifeways, we rejoice in the knowledge that ceremonies given to us by the Creator continue, the original languages are still spoken and our governments remain strong. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 145)

Jessica: Tell me about how cultural oral history has impacted your life. How about as a TCP? What does culture mean to you? Is that present in your decision-making in and out of a work setting?

Karla: Personally, my life has been greatly impacted by the oral stories from my mother. As a TCP I have been doing an elder's webinar where they have the opportunity to share their oral stories with us virtually while we record them. I just finished writing a grant where I included Blackfeet language. It was just supposed to be a pilot project. My goal was to make it free and available to anyone that wanted to take it for language preservation and nothing else. I tried to eliminate all barriers by making it free, virtual, and in the evenings. Blackfeet Elder, Leonard Weasel Traveller, was interested and taught the class. He is a very well-respected and traditional elder in our community, so when he endorsed it, it gave us hope that we could do more of these language classes over Zoom. I opened registration up for the class on a Thursday and the registration numbers just started to climb. I was nervous and wanted everything to go well. I thought maybe we would get

forty or fifty attendees. As the registration for the class climbed, people at BCC were asking me how I was going to manage it. I didn't want to put a cap on the attendees because if people were going to find a way to access it to learn their language, I didn't want to limit that. The class was only open for 4 days. In 4 days, we had 726 people register. It was a 6-week series and we consistently had 300 to 400 people attending each weekly session. We had the chance to connect with our sister tribes in Canada because the medicine line has kept us separated and we finally got to connect. Leonard is actually from Canada, so he taught the class from Canada. Zoom felt like this tool that finally allowed us to collaborate. I did surveys and focus groups from that series so that we could grow our own program at BCC. We have the Blackfoot language, but we have four different dialects based on each band. We picked a fluent speaker from each band and put them together so that we have the chance to hear all of the dialects together.

Marvin Weatherwax Sr. (Southern Piegan), Eldon Weasel Child Siksika (Blackfoot), Mike Bruised Head – Kainawa (Blood), and Leonard Weasel Traveller Apatohsi Piikani (Northern Piegan). They all do an interpretation of each story in their dialect so we can record and preserve it. The stories from these people are so rich and beautiful. In the world of the Blackfoot people, these events have happened and are not considered stories, but our true oral history. When you watch these stories from the context of where you came from, it is a profound piece of our identity. Ecology in Blackfoot means “our way of life.” When we talk about ecology, we are not talking about a subject in science, we are talking about an entire world-view. Through these stories, we are not only learning about our

history, but we are learning about the interconnectedness to honor the animals, plants, and environment. We learn through stories of animals and what they can teach us. For example, we learn stories from wolves that have taught us to hunt.

Karla smiled through this response. She was so inspired by traditional elders in her community. This was evident in her priorities to initiate the elder webinar. I imagined her relatives now living in the spirit world smiling down on her as she helped share their traditional stories with the new generation. Wilma Mankiller talked about the importance of oral tradition for the new generation. “Traditional stories passed from generation to generation as well as ceremonies and rituals contribute to Indigenous people’s understanding of their place in the universe” (Mankiller, 2011).

Jessica: Describe a challenge that you have encountered along your career path as a Native person. Has this influenced your path as a TCP?

Karla: I would say it had to be college. This is because, in the 11 years that I spent in college, I was being trained in western academics and to do my research in a westernized way. I felt so isolated, and I know this is a common experience for American Indian students. Even though I was always around people in my college experience, I still felt very isolated because no one understood who was and where I came from, specifically as a Native person. The higher I went in education, the more skills I gathered to navigate this new world. There are less than 1% Native people in education and when I got to grad school, I didn’t have support to help me navigate comprehensive exams or my dissertation. I had to learn all of that by myself. I remember sitting in a classroom and realizing that I didn’t connect to anyone. The faculty in my doctorate program tried to understand

me and where I was coming from and I appreciated that, but it wasn't the same thing as a Native person understanding my struggle. In my program, there wasn't one class or seminar focused on Native people or Indigenous perspectives. After my training to do my dissertation, I realized none of the methods aligned with the research that I truly wanted to do. I didn't know there were Indigenous research methods until I graduated. So, I used grounded theory as a way to develop a Native theory. It was my only way of breaking out of that western education worldview box.

It did not take long for Karla to respond to this question. This experience was something that had inspired her journey to be a TCU president. I thought about Karla taking that long almost 4-hour drive from Browning to Missoula. I wondered how often Karla made that drive during her college experience. The University of Montana had a student center on campus in an effort for Native students to find community in a college setting. Karla's story was a testament to the importance of higher education institutions employing faculty and staff representative of their Native populations. I thought about what her experience may have been like if she would have had support and community. Karla's story was important. Her story mattered. I felt her passion for wanting to change this experience for future graduate students. This college experience was an experience that many Indigenous people felt of the reservation. Mankiller highlighted this complicated issue for Native people living off of the reservation. "Many regularly travel back and forth to their homelands for spiritual, social, and cultural sustenance. No matter how long Native people live away, many continue to derive their identity from their homelands" (Mankiller, 2011, p. 371). These experiences illuminated the importance of Tribal colleges serving students on reservations.

Jessica: How has your childhood contributed to where you are today?

Karla: I had a great childhood thanks to my parents that had rich expectations for education. I knew in kindergarten or first grade that I was going to go to college. My mom used to say that at the age of 5, a child knows whether they are going to go to college. All of my siblings went to college and also modeled knowing as children that they wanted to attend college. My mom was a Cut Bank boarding school survivor and she still pursued higher education and earned her bachelor's while my dad earned his associates in business. My mom was born in 1948 which was the reservation and boarding school era. Her family didn't have running water, electricity, and they lived in a one-room home. At that time there was a high prevalence of alcoholism as a coping mechanism because of colonialism and trauma. She ended up going to a boarding school and in the summers, she would stay with foster families. When I think about her wanting and earning her bachelor's degree from that background, it's truly amazing. She was encouraged by a teacher in her high school who said, "you are going to college." She paved the way for education in our household and the expectation was there. My siblings are such high achievers in different areas. My oldest brother is an artist and pursued architecture and engineering. My other brother Kenny graduated with a degree in forestry. My sister Kendra in high school traveled all over the country with her science fair project and she was testing different forms of treatment for cancer one of her treatments came back as an effective form of cancer treatment. She was doing doctoral-level research in high school. My sister Dana earned her degree in sociology and her master's in counselor education. So, because of my

mom's example of success, we all achieved. My mom ended up being a teacher. We loved her example so much that we would play school at home. My mom facilitated a lot of learning. We lived pretty far out of town, so we spent a lot of time exploring the environment and the animals around us. If we needed anything in college, my parents were incredibly supportive. We were very privileged. My mom always told us that persistence is what it takes to be successful. I decided to research persistence in my dissertation. When I finished the first three chapters of my dissertation, I brought it to my mom to look at. I remember her light up when she saw that I had chosen to pursue persistence which was inspired by her. We ended up losing my mom right after I finished the first three chapters of my dissertation. I was so happy that she got the chance to read the first three chapters. I dedicated my dissertation to her and my dad. It made my dissertation process so special.

Jessica: What barriers did you encounter as you pursued your goal of becoming a TCP?

Karla laughed. Karla had shared that she had been guided by the Creator in this process. I imagined that she was laughing thinking about how incredible it was that the Creator had picked her for this position, in this moment. I felt the trust that she had for her future. She would be where she needed to be because the Creator would bring her there.

Karla: I was the barrier for myself in getting to the job of becoming a TCP. I went into higher education because I wanted to work at BCC and that was my end game. There was a point in time when The University of Montana offered to grandfather me in to be a principal. I didn't want to do that because I know the standards and pressures that public schools are under. Indigenous people know what is best for

Indigenous people, so I wanted to focus my aspirations on a Tribal college setting. The only way that I would be a principal is if it was a Tribal school. I knew, however, that I wanted to work at BCC and this degree was for BCC. I didn't know at what capacity. Whether it be a researcher, student success, faculty. I was open to anything. I believed in Tribal college education. I always aspired to be in administration at BCC but I thought maybe it would happen when I was in my 60s when I have had tons of experience. When the current president job opened, it wasn't on my mind to apply because I didn't think that I had the experience necessary to give this institution what it deserved. but one of my mentors encouraged me to apply. So, I applied. I had just graduated with my doctorate and I'm young so I didn't think my application would go anywhere. I didn't get a call back, so I was moving on and one day they called me back and invited me in for an interview. I did all this preparation for the interview because I thought it would be great practice for me. When it came time for me to the interview portion where I sat before the board of BCC, I felt like I had really hit every question to my best ability, and I have never felt that way in an interview before. I left there feeling like even if they didn't pick me, that was the best that I had in me. They called me a couple of days later and invited me back for further interviews. I think in my mind, I was doing these interviews to gain the skills and training, but it had never truly dawned on me that it would happen. My mentor told me the whole time I was interviewing that if they offered me the position, I could always turn it down, so I had that in mind to ease the stress. When they offered me, the president position, my mentor told me to not be foolish and to take the job. It got me

thinking that for women to get into leadership positions like this, it is almost more work. After I accepted the job, my life responsibilities changed overnight. All the sudden I went from a college kid to a representative for a whole college community.

Jessica: Tell me about your relationships with faculty and students at your TC?

Karla: Students are so precious to me. We have traditional and not traditional students.

Their talents and curiosities speak volumes. All of the money that we received for COVID-19 support has been put towards our students. The initiative that I try to promote is not only culture and language, but also student-centered perspective. An example of that is that we forgave all student debt this year. It ties in with persistence because we forgave student debt for students that weren't successful at BCC as well as those that were successful. This gave those students that weren't successful the opportunity to persist and go back to school if they wanted to. When you look at the American Indian literature on persistence, it says that we shouldn't talk about dropping out as a failure. Instead, we should talk about it as stepping out of higher education and it's okay to step back in at any point. The message that we wanted to send students after we forgave their debt, was for them to see and feel that they had the chance to come back with a second chance. The fall after we forgave student debt, we had 128 come back debt-free. We also did fifty percent off of tuition and we purchased 500 laptops. We know in this community, sometimes students don't have money to buy laptops for online education. That is what makes Tribal colleges so special. We go a step beyond because these are our people, and this is about building capacity in this

community. The more access we provide, it can improve their quality of life but it contributes to our community and local society. I like to invite students in to visit with me and I listen to how they are doing and give them support if they need it. I do this thing called pizza with the president where they can come in and have pizza while we talk. I am thankful for the faculty that we do have because I know how hard it is to fill faculty positions in rural areas. Our faculty work here because they want to and they are invested in our students. All of our faculty is student-centered.

Leadership Through Culture

Karla has led with her heart and it was evident in her presence in her building, in meetings, and with students. I observed interactions where she let Elders take all of the allotted meeting time to share knowledge or thought processes. In interviews, she described the students at BCC as “precious” multiple times. She has taken on the role as her TCU president by making culture the center of every decision and by making sure that students at her institution feel welcomed, especially if they were “stepping back into” education. In Indigenous communities, it was important to have a foundation of care and understanding such as being welcomed with open arms in a college setting. Cajete (1994) described Indigenous teaching as focusing as much on learning with the heart as on learning with the mind. In this sense, Karla exemplified learning and leading with her heart.

Jessica Name one elder that has influenced you the most in your life. Why?

Karla: My grandmother Rose Bullshoe-Bird. She raised me and I was there where she departed from this world. I was with my mom and dad when they departed from this world too, and I have been told can be a gift to be there in those last moments.

My grandmother Rose was a profound and dynamic person that was very invested in her grandchildren. My childhood was rich because of her and all of the contributions that she made to my childhood. She had several grandchildren, but we all felt special to her. She took the time to invest in each grandchild and she taught us what spirituality was. She had really special spiritual experiences and she was able to share those with us. Our Blackfeet way is a strength-based orientation. Our elders would observe what gifts aligned with different children and they would mold them. Rose always saw her grandchildren from a strength-based perspective.

Women in Native communities have had a very special bond and connection. I felt the connection that Karla had to her grandmother. A smile came over her face as she reflected on her grandma Rose. Mankiller reflected on the beautiful connections that she had to other Indigenous women.

The deep, binding connection among Indigenous women can be explained in part by our common life experiences, patterns of thought, and shared values, but I also believe it can be partially explained by a more complete whole, and interconnected understanding of the world. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 5)

I thought about the interconnectedness shared between a grandmother and granddaughter; a bond that does not change through the transition to the spirit world.

Jessica: Why are TC's important

Karla: The whole purpose of my degree was so I could work at a Tribal college because I believe in Tribal-Centered education. I was willing to work in any area just to be at BCC. Only Native people know what Native people need and Native people

should be the ones designing curricula for other Native people. Role modeling is so important and Native students need to see themselves in the instructors and leaders at Tribal colleges. So many people worked toward finding funding for Tribal colleges at the national level. When I look around and see what has already been built, it makes me realize that so many people have come before me to make sure that our students and our community have a place to learn. They provide education to Tribal communities in remote areas. They also provide cultural-specific degree opportunities like our Piikani studies degree. That is important because it preserves our pathway and community. They are important for employment on reservations and having our own people lead our Tribal colleges in these efforts.

Jessica: What do you perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide TC's?

Karla smiled. She shared that this was a hard question because there were so many skills required for this job. She took minute and responded.

Karla: Someone effective at communicating. There are so many stakeholders involved in making one decision. We are an entity that practices shared governance, and we must make sure that we are effectively communicating because things can go wrong if people are not effectively communicating. If there is a curriculum decision, it goes through the curriculum team, the leadership team, my recommendation, and then the last decision is our college board. At that level, there are three levels of communication. I must honor input, get everyone on the same page to move forward, and make it all work. It can be complicated.

Fortunately, each of these stakeholders keeps a common vision. The external stakeholders are AIHEC, American Indian College Fund, TCU Presidents, Partnerships, Donors, and the Tribal Council. Sometimes the process isn't smooth and when that happens, we have to work hard to communicate about how we can be solution focused. You can't walk into the room with the idea that you know everything. I try to honor all of the input and listen to suggestions to use judgment and evaluate data. There are so many characteristics needed for this job, being responsible, being mature, being respectful, considerate, listening, and good judgment.

Jessica: What supports do you have that have assisted you in obtaining your position as a TCP?

Karla: First and foremost, my walk with the Creator. I have this profound belief that there is a path for me and it will be guided by the Creator. My family. Even though my parents have both now passed away, I still really depend on their support through a spiritual aspect. I receive a lot of support from my siblings. Sometimes it is tough support because they always tell me the truth. I also have some great people here at this institution and in this community that support me. I feel very lucky. Leadership is about people choosing to follow and support someone. I feel like I get that here.

I was inspired by Karla's connection to the Creator. I thought about her journey and how this was her guiding force. Mankiller highlighted that spirituality among Native people had stood the test of time.

Despite several hundred years of sustained opposition from the U.S. government and various dogmatic religious groups, the spiritual lifeways, practices, and traditions given to Indigenous people by the Creator at the beginning of time continue in round houses, longhouses, kivas, ceremonial grounds and other sacred places, as well as in their daily lives. (Mankiller, 2011. p. 11)

Jessica: What values are most important to you in your work?

Karla: Faith, communication, and respect. I try to be as respectful as I can. Reflection is a big part of my role here. I try to encourage my teams at BCC to do more reflecting where they can take a step back and ask if their approach offended anyone. I think that is a big piece of respect. When we are self-aware, it allows for a lot of growth and that is what I want for BCC.

Jessica: How have your leadership skills developed over your time as a TCP?

Karla: I have had the opportunity to grow so much in this role. Before I got this job, I was in college pursuing my Ed.D. and all I was thinking about was myself and my education. Since I have started this position, I have had to completely evolve as a leader and a person. My personal life had to take a step back and quieter now. I know that I represent a whole community now. Before this, I was able to just be Karla. It is about so much more now. I am very mindful of that and my current decision-making. Overnight, I became a major role model in my community. My responses to hurtful behavior from people have grown. It can be really hard to be the bigger person in every scenario. This job requires a lot of toughness and strength to not internalize things.

Leadership Through Language

Oral storytelling has been a lifeline to historic events passed down for generations. MacDonald (1998) described storytelling as encompassing complex information on human subsistence and infused with elements to engage the heart with the mind. Indigenous storytelling was infused with cultural beliefs, knowledge, history, and nature. Many Indigenous stories have not been translated which exemplified the importance of learning traditional language. Karla has prioritized language and storytelling at BCC by infusing culture and language into every class and keeping elders and her Tribal community at the forefront of her decision-making.

Jessica: How have lessons from your Tribal community guided your leadership as a TCP?

Karla: The culture and the language have guided me. It is so powerful. The lesson is that you'll never go wrong as long as you have the culture and the language and the foundation. It will always be the right choice at the right time as long as you have culture and language as the foundation of everything that you do. The community will always support it even if they don't have the resources to do so.

Jessica: Did you grow up on your home reservation? If yes, what was it like? How is it different now?

Karla: I did grow up in Browning on my home reservation. When I was growing up, I experienced country life because I grew up out of town. I had the opportunity to learn from elders that shared stories with me. When I was a kid, Earl Old Person would come to our classroom and share stories with our community. He was present at graduation, games, and even college graduation. He would speak the language in the old Blackfeet dialect. I think about our kids and our youth today

and how they won't have an Earl Old Person or elders that bring all of this cultural richness into their lives. Many more elders spoke the language and connected to the old ways of life when I was growing up. Our connection is through people. I worry about what the kids will have when our elders are passing.

Indigenous communities have been constantly faced with the task of revitalizing and sustaining culture and language. I thought of Karla and all of the work that she was doing in her community to revitalize and sustain traditional practices. Mankiller talked about how many Tribal communities faced this complicated and incredibly important task.

Tribal elders have expressed concern that the traditional values and ceremonies that have sustained us since the beginning of time are now "slipping away." Many tribal communities have made it a priority to recapture, protect, and maintain traditional tribal knowledge systems and lifeways that are often described as a whole or interconnected way of viewing things. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 146)

Jessica: How were you personally impacted by your local TC growing up? How did this impact your path to becoming a TCP?

Karla: I was connected first through my Grandma Rose. She went to the missionary school. She was raised during a time when our people were very affected by colonization. She was one of ten siblings. All of her siblings that were older than her spoke Blackfeet and all of her siblings that were younger than her didn't know their traditional language. She was the only one that spoke both. In her household, she was the one who translated within her own home. As she got older, she started to lose her ability to speak her traditional language. She came to BCC at an

elderly age to learn the Blackfeet language again and helped her find that part of herself again. That was how BCC personally impacted my story. Today many of the people that are in our elder seminar class that I facilitate are like my grandma Rose. They are there seeking opportunities to get their language and culture back. I feel so blessed to be able to be part of that.

Ecology Means Our Way of Life

As Karla shared about her life, it was evident that her culture and community were at the center of everything she did. Looking around her office, I saw various beautiful pieces of art representing Native culture. When asked about where she attained such beautiful pieces of art, Karla responded by saying she inherited them with the office and that material things did not hold the same value as traditional stories or memories. I thought about her ancestors and how they lived in various bands that were big enough to defend against attacks but small enough to be mobile if they needed to move quickly, not allowing much room to bring material things. In this sense, Karla emulated the true ecology of her ancestors.

Artifacts

Sandra and Karla have lived beautifully different lives that have guided to this present moment. Both taking pieces from their mentors and community as they continued to blaze trails for their people and TCUs as a whole. As they continued to take on each obstacle head-on like a herd of Bison, they carried fragments of things, sometimes material, that complimented each decision. For Sandra, it was a beautiful memory of her childhood and connection to her father through a glacial rock that he gifted her from one of his military tours. For Karla, it was pictures that represented memories, frozen in time, with the most influential people in her life. Edwards and I'Anson (2020) stated that the use of artifacts in the research process could afford the in-

depth insight into participants and their lives. The use of artifacts in this study connected material items to overall identity.

Finding Resilience through Rocks

Figure 15 shows a glacial rock that was provided by Sandra,

Figure 15

Sandra Artifact 1



Jessica: Tell me about this artifact

Sandra: These are rocks, but if you look at them closely, they are almost like glass. They are like that because they are glacial rocks. As they go forward and backward, they are polished to look like this from the pressure and movement. I have had these rocks for a very long time, and I think about them sometimes. These rocks are really interesting because of the movements and the pressures that these have been through, it has allowed them to be polished into this incredible glass. Some of these will break and become sand. I was thinking, why do these end up like this

when some end up shattered, sand, and silt? I think it has something to do with their composition, their base, where they sit, and how well they can move with the ebbs and flows that lead them through a very hard/harsh situation. Somehow, they come out incredibly beautiful. I think that is the story of resilience that is part of our base cultural values as Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille people. I think about our students and our experiences, and if we can find the right foundation and we can go with the ebbs and flows of life, we don't break, and that adversity can actually create Beauty.

Figure 16 shows the tin that held Sandra's glacial rocks for decades.

Figure 16

Sandra Artifact 2



Jessica: Do these have other significance to you?

Sandra: Yes, they remind me of my childhood and my dad when he was stationed in different places during his Air Force career. He collected these for me when he

was stationed in Greenland. At the time I was very young, and I didn't know where Greenland was located. During his deployment, the rest of our family stayed back in Montana and lived in St. Ignatius. It was hard to spend a year away from him. He was stationed away from his family twice in his military career. He was sent to Greenland and Vietnam.

Jessica: Is it special to think of where these rocks once were?

Sandra: Yes. I've always wondered as I got older, what they are, and I have always wondered if we have anything like this here in Montana. We probably do as we have similar glacial activity.

Jessica: Where do you keep these?

Sandra: I keep these in a jewelry box. I have moved to many different places over the course of my life, and I don't want these to disappear in one of my moves. I have them in a jewelry box to keep them protected because I don't want them to shift around and hit each other or break. Someday maybe I will make something out of them.

The rocks were delicately wrapped in colored Kleenex and placed in a Sucrets tin container, symbolizing the time that these rocks had been in Sandra's care. I imagined the rocks moving with her, in her jewelry box for decades, following her through the ebbs and flows of careers, marriage, children, and life. The delicate care that she had given these rocks was obvious in their flawless nature. These rocks were a symbol of the resilience that Sandra had found in herself and the students at Salish Kootenai College.

Prayers, Family, and Guidance

Jessica: Tell me about your artifact

Karla: I decided to pick two pictures to share as my artifacts. I don't carry attachments to material. If I had to pick one material item that holds a special place in my heart, it is pictures because they have captured special moments.

Figure 17 shows Karla in her high school graduation robe, posing for a picture with her parents.

Figure 17

Karla Artifact 1



Karla: These pictures are special to me because they are from different educational milestones. My parents were an active part of my education. My parents are still an active part of my life today when I pray and ask for their guidance. I have a strong connection to them in the spirit world. I have had the opportunity to turn my grief of losing them into a blessing. When I was going through the grief of losing my mother, I met with a Blackfoot woman. She asked me why I was

seeking to meet, and I shared with her that I was with my parents as they left into the spirit world and I was still grappling with the loss. She shared with me that it is a gift to be there when a spirit leaves into the next world. After that, I felt the blessing of having been there in their last moments and I talk to them and ask for their guidance often.

Figure 18 shows Karla holding a family photo during her college graduation.

Figure 18

Karla Artifact 2



Jessica: That is really special

Karla: Yes, I believe that the Creator has a continual plan for me. I feel so blessed to have so many people in the spirit world guiding me. Throughout my journey this far, I realize that my foundational support continually comes from my parents and my grandmother. When I think of my Grandma Rose, I think about how she made each of her grandchildren feel uniquely special and how much love she had to give. Her traditional oral stories guide me and inspire me to connect our elders to Blackfeet Community College so that they can share their oral stories with our students. I think about my mother and her love of education and how that expectation of earning a college expectation has inspired me to continue with my education. I think of my dad and how he taught us to enjoy the world around us. He taught us to live off of the land, just as he did growing up. I thank him for showing me that we have so much to learn from the plants, animals, and world around us. Wherever my journey takes me, I know that I will always have them with me.

Pictures have been seen as entities that captured earthly moments in time. Karla saw these moments as opportunities to still be in those moments although they were now lived through the spirit world. Her connections to her spirit-living relatives and the Creator symbolized her ability to connect to everything around her, in a truly Indigenous way. I imagined her parents and grandma smiling as she led their reservation Tribal college with faith and most importantly, persistence.

Emergent Themes

While each participants' portrait was detailed within separate contexts, their stories blended together to deliver a united picture of what caring, culture, and language meant within a Tribal college environment. While each participant shared their own ideas of what leadership in a Tribal college environment meant, there was no right or wrong answer to the questions such as, "How have lessons from your Tribal community guided your leadership as a TCP?" Each participant has had unique life experiences and those were expressed in each response. This research aimed to understand more about the life experiences of two Tribal college presidents and highlighted the impacts that Tribal colleges had in the communities that they served.

The portraits of Karla and Sandra illuminated the challenges and highlighted the success that Tribal college administrators experienced in their roles as Tribal college presidents. Themes were examined throughout my research to categorize the understandings of each president in their current role. Each participant's experience in this role was different and personal to each individual. Themes were analyzed with emotion coding and through a nature-identity lens. Saldaña (2009) described emotion coding as labeling emotions experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant. This type of coding was appropriate for this portraiture because the participants recounted interpersonal experiences. Gee (2000) described the nature of identity as being a force that a person had no control over. For me, this was being a multi-racial woman. Viewing this research through my nature identity as a multi-racial Native woman gave me insight into understanding the experiences of each participant. Themes were analyzed with the theoretical underpinnings of James Banks' multicultural education and Nel Noddings' components of Moral Education. A list of emergent themes follows:

- Leadership through Culturally Sustaining Practices

- Leadership through Parental Guidance
- Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era

Culturally Sustaining Practices

Culturally Sustaining practices were at the center of each Tribal college and at the center of each president's personal narrative. This came into focus in observations and interviews with Sandra when she shared about how she had grown in her Indigenous identity through her extensive work with Tribal communities and as the wife of a very culturally traditional Ojibwe spouse. In observations, Sandra proudly wore beaded jewelry as an Indigenous woman and started every meeting "in a good way" by asking someone from the Tribal community to give respect to the Creator and the world for its blessings. Connecting to her Tribal community was the focus of Sandra's work when she started as president of SKC. As Sandra said, "They want to know the truth. They are all invested in our college probably more than any other entity on the reservation." Karla's focus on her Tribal community became evident with her elder webinars and her pizza with the president events. She prioritized her Tribal community as the leading entity of BCC. As Carla said, "That is what makes Tribal colleges so special. We go a step beyond because these are our people, and this is about building capacity in this community. The more access we provide, it can improve their quality of life but it contributes to our community and local society."

Leadership through Parental Guidance

Parental guidance was intertwined into interview responses and leadership observations. Parental influence was present in Kara's decision-making as she asked for guidance from her parents in every leadership decision that she made. Karla said, "Even though my parents have both now passed away, I still really depend on their support through a spiritual aspect." Karla

also shared that her mother instilled an expectation for persistence, and she not only exemplified that through her own work, but she supported students when they stepped back into college showing persistence. Sandra reflected on her mother's education experience during the boarding school movement to deeper understand and reflect on the inherited trauma that her students and staff may carry from the boarding school movement. Her inspiration to pursue college came from a shared experience that she had with her mother. This experience has still guided her in her focus on non-traditional students at SKC.

Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era

Both Karla and Sandra's mothers attended Indian Boarding Schools. Karla's mother attended the Cut Bank Boarding School and Sandra's mother attended the Ursuline Academy. Both presidents shared about how this experience led them to a loss in their culture and language which had inspired a resurgence in their leadership focus at each Tribal College. As Sandra said, "My mother didn't have a good experience at the Ursulines Indian Boarding School, especially with Mother Superior. She's got an interesting message going to school there which was, if you can pass as White, you need to walk away from your culture and forget you're Indian." This focus was clear in interviews and observations at both BCC and SKC where revitalizing and sustaining culture and language was at the center of everything they did. Karla used the term "survivor" when referring to her mother's boarding school experience. As Karla stated, "My mom was a Cut Bank boarding school survivor and she still pursued higher education and earned her bachelor's." Both presidents had connections to an era that sought to remove culture and language from people in their families and communities and it was apparent as a driving force in their decision making at their institutions.

Research Questions

This study aimed to understand how Tribal college presidents experience the process of being and becoming college presidents. This study was guided by four research questions.

Q1 How have the cultural and life experiences of two Tribal college presidents influenced their roles as leaders?

Culture and life experiences have had extensive influence on the roles of Tribal college presidents. Findings have shown that culture and life experiences were relevant in their social interactions, decision-making, and their overall presence at their institutions. Findings have shown that culture was defined as historical and traditional Indigenous culture. Life experiences were defined as experiences gained from childhood, education, and careers. Karla and Sandra navigated the world of Tribal college leadership described within each individual portrait. Each perspective and lens were uniquely different based on their lived experiences. Each expressed that the job of being a Tribal college president could be difficult and challenging at times but neither shared that they did not enjoy their role or take their responsibilities seriously. Both shared that they had encountered racism in college settings. For Sandra, it was defined as lateral oppression. For Karla, it was a lack of representation in every aspect of her college experience. Both of these experiences guided their decision making when working with American Indian students and colleagues.

Q2 What have been the most influential experiences in the lives of two Tribal college presidents?

Through the portraits, findings have shown that the most influential experiences that Karla and Sandra had in their lives have been experiences involving Indigenous culture. Karla experienced this in childhood through her mother and grandmother who shared traditional stories

with her. It has guided her in her leadership today, making elders the center of culture and language at BCC.

Both presidents shared their community connection relied heavily on Tribal elders as mentors. According to O’Hanley (2014), working with a good mentor could enable you to develop good mentoring behaviors and become a guide for others in the future. In addition to this, O’Hanley (2014) stated that a mentor could offer wisdom and learn from past experiences and that a mentee could benefit from listening to the lessons that a mentor had learned along the way through their past experiences. This sort of mentorship completely aligned with cultural practices among Tribal communities. For Sandra, she shared that much of her mentorship came not only from her Tribal community and elders but from her husband who had inspired a re-connection to her culture that she did not have growing up, especially while living in the deep south as a child.

Q3 What research and innovation have been the most influential on Tribal college presidents’ leadership decisions?

Each president shared that research on historical trauma and culturally sustaining practices guided them at their institutions. Having Native people make leadership and educational decisions for Native students was a form of culturally sustaining practice. As Karla stated, “Only Native people know what Native people need and Native people should be the ones designing curricula for other Native people. Role modeling is so important and Native students need to see themselves in the instructors and leaders at Tribal colleges.”

Harrison (2019) described historical trauma as cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences. With this definition, we could assume that many historical events have caused historical trauma in Native communities, such as relocation, when American Indians were forced

into leaving their ancestral homes to designated Indian Territories or Reservations. This understanding of historical trauma and how it was directly related to American Indian people could guide how Tribal colleges were addressing it with their students. A cultural sustaining practice for American Indian people was to face adversities together as a Tribal community. Sandra used the analogy of bison facing a storm as an example.

When there is a storm, wild bison put the babies in the middle and then make a circle around them all facing out. This is so they can protect whatever it is, together as a group. They make this incredible ring. If it's a horrible blizzard or something and they need to move, they walk directly into the storm, as a group. I feel like that's kind of what we've done. We've herded up, stuck our head directly into it and we're trying to power through it.

Through each portrait, findings have shown that Tribal colleges were utilizing innovated methods that were grounded in research on Indigenous communities to approach leadership decisions.

Q4 What is the significance of the Tribal college president's histories/stories for the communities that they serve, as well as for higher education in general?

Through portraits, findings showed that each president was significantly impacted by their childhood experiences. Each of these experiences guided them when serving their Tribal college communities. For Sandra, it was having a deep understanding and respect for non-traditional students which was something she experienced through the eyes of her mother. For Karla, it was having a deep understanding of the importance of Tribal-centered education which was something that she felt she missed out on.

Review and Preview

This current chapter weaved through the individual experiences of Karla and Sandra, Tribal college presidents, and a brief excerpt on Tribal college president emeritus Joe McDonald. Both Sandra and Karla expressed impacts from their background and childhood on their leadership decisions as Tribal college presidents. It was found that each president had a unique backstory and history that has inspired them to pursue Tribal college leadership. Although these portraits were uniquely different exemplifying the various ways that they lived, some common themes surfaced. Themes of *Leadership through Culturally Sustaining Practices*, *Leadership through Parental Guidance*, and *Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era* surfaced as being important for each Tribal college president as they continued the journey of becoming leaders in their communities. In the final chapter, Chapter V: Discussion, I highlight this research and its focus within Tribal college education. I also propose implications for stakeholders, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

“TCUs often serve geographically remote areas where no other post-secondary educational opportunities exist and become pillars to communities they serve” (Stull et al., 2015, p. 6). In addition to this, Stull et al. (2015) stated that the ways in which TCUs contributed to education were, by nation building and Indigenous knowledge system building, keeping college affordable for low-income students, fostering economic development and workforce training, hiring diverse faculty, and producing research on American Indian issues from an AIAN perspective.

With this research, I explored the lives of two Tribal college presidents. Within each individual portrait, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts of each president’s background, the relationship with their Tribal College, and the Tribal community to find if those contributed to their daily decision-making. The following sections of this current chapter discuss their research in relation to the implications for stakeholders, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

The theoretical underpinnings of this research included James Banks’ multicultural education and Nel Noddings’ components of Moral Education. Each of these underpinnings was used to assist my research from data collection to analysis. James Bank’s work in multicultural education served as inspiration for this research as it recognized the need for education to change

in order to serve our vastly growing minority student populations. Tribal Colleges served as pillars in minority-based education because their teaching practices and curricula aligned with the Native students that they served. An equity pedagogy existed when teachers modified their teaching in ways that would facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, and social-class groups (Banks & Banks, 1995). Through this study, I found that equity pedagogy as culturally sustaining and revitalizing education was the central focus of each president's leadership decision-making. Parental guidance/relationships and resilience were large parts of TCU leadership that surfaced in this study and allowed for a deeper understanding of the lives of each president and how that informs their daily decisions.

The findings of this study revealed that there were three common themes among the participants. The three themes in this study included: (a) Leadership through Culturally Sustaining Practices, (b) Leadership through Parental Guidance, and (c) Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era. This study revealed that each president has had unique lived experiences that inspired who they were and the leadership decisions that they made on a daily basis. Findings concluded that Sandra had a deep care for her Tribal college institution and her family that aligned with Nel Noddings' components of Moral Education. Findings also concluded that Karla had a deep connection in guidance from the Creator and focus on Tribal-centered education that aligned with James Banks' multicultural education perspective. While both of these portraits were individual, based upon the different lives that Sandra and Karla both have experienced, the themes from this research could be used as further understanding of leadership decision processes at TCUs.

Overview

This research sought to explore the stories of two Tribal College presidents in the state of Montana. Qualitative portraiture methodology was used to recount the complex lives of each Tribal college president. The study focused on two (2) presidents, Sandra and Karla. Personal observations were documented through notetaking and recording, photographs, and interviews to unveil the unique and individual life portraits. The research questions below guided design, data collection, and analysis.

- Q1 How have the cultural and life experiences of two Tribal college presidents influenced their roles as leaders?
- Q2 What have been the most influential experiences in the lives of two Tribal college presidents?
- Q3 What research and innovation have been the most influential on Tribal college presidents' leadership decisions?
- Q4 What is the significance of the Tribal college president's histories/stories for the communities that they serve, as well as for higher education in general?

Findings and Implications

The findings of this research highlighted the unique and individual lives that Tribal college leaders lived and the impacts that they had on the communities that they served. The findings of this research revealed three components of leadership that have been gained by shared individual experiences of each president. Although leadership has had many different facets, this research found that the lived experiences of each president led to similar leadership focuses at each Tribal college. Those focuses are as follows: (a) Leadership through Culturally Sustaining Practices, (b) Leadership through Parental Guidance, and (c) Leadership through Resilience of the Boarding School Era. These findings offered important implications for Tribal communities, the TCU community, and higher education as a whole.

Tribal Communities and Higher Education Through Tribal Colleges

Tribal colleges have had a positive impact on the communities that they served. They have continued to revitalize and sustain Tribal cultures and language. Tribal colleges have offered career opportunities for community members and Tribal elders to serve as faculty and staff. Libraries have continued to serve as archives for Tribally focused research and data. Curricula focused at Tribal colleges have continued to promote Native perspectives which strengthen Tribal Sovereignty. Degree opportunities at Tribal colleges have led to careers that improved Tribal infrastructure as well as health professionals needed to improve the well-being of Tribal communities. Community-based programs such as Upward Bound, language and reading programs, and cultural revitalizing classes such as beading, and drumming were a few programs offered at Tribal colleges to strengthen community-base and college relationships. Indigenous perspectives have valued the whole individual and education and was seen as something that was attainable for all. Stull et al. (2015) stated:

Tribal colleges have taken it upon themselves to be a cultural revitalizing pillars in their communities. The potential to use Tribal colleges as an example to revitalize cultural practices is expansive. It is not established through this research if similar minority-focused higher education institutions are utilizing practices similar to Indigenous-focused institutions. Using the themes of leadership found in this research may bring forth opportunities for leaders especially those working with Indigenous communities, the opportunity to grow in their abilities to connect their own experiences to their education community. (Stull et al., 2015, para 1)

Moreover, similar research could highlight other Tribal college leaders than those offered in this research. That would allow for a wider understanding of experiences and leadership for TCUs. Similar research could be on geographically different TCUs such as those not in the state of Montana or in the Northwestern United States. If further research on other TCU leaders could occur, leadership abilities in higher education institutions could evolve. Western academia has had the opportunity to grow and expand from further research on TCU leadership and Indigenous practices. When students felt that their work was connected to the world in every aspect, just as it was in an Indigenous lens, students all over the country may see education from a different perspective rather than that of one that seeks to earn a degree to simply move into the working world.

Limitations

The limitations of this research included utilizing only two (2) Tribal colleges and two (2) Tribal college presidents, a limited data college period, and the research methodology, itself. The decision to choose just two Tribal colleges was in the interest of time limitations and finding two Tribal colleges in the state of Montana that were relatively close to each other. Including multiple Tribal college settings and multiple Tribal college leaders would have expanded this research and given opportunities for a deeper understanding of the vision of TCUs as a whole. Moreover, including more than two TCU presidents would have allowed for deeper perspectives specific to other Tribes, geographically located reservations, and leaders of various genders and identities. The data collection period for this research was over a 3-month period and this study would have benefitted from an entire year of observations and data collection to observe each leader over a more extended period of time, especially in the changing environment of COVID-19.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research focused on the lives of two Tribal college leaders. More specifically, this research focused on their stories of who they each individually were and how or if those stories had an impact on their present-day leadership decisions. This research uncovered themes and a closer look at the individual lives of two Tribal college presidents while focusing on interviews, field observations, and personal artifacts. While common themes of leadership were identified among the participants, their identity, culture, and lived experiences differed in how they projected those into their varying leadership styles.

Nationwide Tribal College Leadership Research

This topic would benefit from future research exploring the differences in leadership at TCUs across the nation. This study focused on two of seven TCU presidents in the state of Montana, alone. Doing this future research would allow for a growing understanding of TCU leadership and observe the differences across varying tribes and the impacts of TCUs on their communities. Future research on TCU leadership may align with the current research in this study, but it could also expand upon geographic differences in TCUs. For example, TCUs that are not located on reservations but in Urban settings like Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, may yield a different leadership focus, life experiences of students not living on reservations, and community involvement off of reservations. Further, attaining TCU leadership across the Nation should be explored to understand the requirements of becoming a TCU president more fully.

Participants

Staff and Faculty

This research would benefit from the use of staff at each TCU. Staff members at TCUs make up very large pieces of TCU communities. These studies could be done in congruence with assessing TCU leadership or be done separately to assess their life experiences and how it has influenced their roles as staff and faculty at their prospective TCUs today.

Non-Native Staff and Faculty

This research would benefit from the use of non-Native staff and faculty to assess their impacts on their TCUs and how their life experiences have brought them to institutions where they serve as the minority, racially and culturally. Studying non-Native staff and faculty at TCUs would serve as an opportunity for TCUs to grow their professional development strategies and recruitment strategies. Professional development strategies may be focused on working with Native populations and how non-Native staff and faculty can connect, serve, and work to lift up the marginalized groups that they are serving.

Conclusion

This research focused on the life stories and leadership practices of two Tribal college presidents. Each Tribal college president had different experiences both personally and culturally that guided them through life, and hearing about experiences and events allowed a deeper understanding of what drove these leaders. Tribal colleges were meant to specifically focus on the Tribe that they were serving, this was so they may meet the unique needs of the Tribal community. Stull et al. (2015) stated, like many institutions, TCUs were often scrutinized for their low first-time, full-time graduation rates. However, these institutions have done so much more than simply award degrees. Tribal Colleges and Universities have often served

geographically remote areas where no other post-secondary educational opportunities existed and became pillars to the communities they served. There were countless ways these institutions contributed to communities, academia, and student success. It was evident in the findings of this research that TCUs were much more than education entities for their communities. Both participants shared the stress that was involved in leading TCUs as they served as pillars for an entire community.

Most importantly, this research illuminated the importance of Indigenous women in leadership. Leadership as an Indigenous woman has proven to be an incredibly hard task that has had to overcome endless stereotypes. These women are breaking glass ceilings, redefining leadership predispositions and inspiring the next generation of Indigenous women.

No matter where Indigenous women gather or for what purpose, they almost always talk about family and community and express concern about traditional values, culture, and lifeways slipping away. It is the women who are responsible for bringing along the next generation to carry the culture forward. (Mankiller, 2011, p. 352)

REFERENCES

- “About bison range restoration.” (n.d.). Bison Range. <https://bisonrange.org/>
- Adams, D. W. (1995). *Education for extinction: American Indians and the boarding school experience: 1875-1928*. University of Kansas Press.
- Allaire, C. (2021, March 22). *Indigenous ribbon work always tells a story*. Vogue.
<https://www.vogue.com/article/geronimo-louie-indigenous-ribbon-work>
- American Indian Higher Education Consortium and The Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2001). *Building strong communities: Tribal colleges as engaged institutions*.
<http://www.aihec.org/our-stories/docs/reports/TCUsAsEngagedInstitutions.pdf>
- As Students of Color Surpass Whites, A Closer Look at Numbers*. (2022). NBC News.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/students-color-surpass-whites-closer-look-numbers-n193811>
- Banks, C. A. M., & Banks, J. A. (1995). Equity pedagogy: An essential component of multicultural education. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 151-158.
- Banks, J. A. (1989). Approaches to multicultural curriculum reform. *Trotter Review*, 3(3), Article 5. https://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter_review/vol3/iss3/5
- Banks, J. A. (1993). Multicultural education: Historical development, dimensions, and practice. *Review of research in education*, 19, 3-49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167339>
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. M. (2015). *Multicultural education*. Routledge.

- Belgrade, M. J., & LoRé, R. K. (2003). The retention/intervention study of native American undergraduates at the University of New Mexico. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 5(2), 175-203. (EJ773534). ERIC.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ773534>
- Blackfeet Community College. (n.d.). <https://bfcc.edu/about-us/>
- Bowman, N. (2009, Summer). Dreamweavers: Tribal college presidents build institutions bridging two worlds. *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, 20(4), 12-18. <https://tribalcollegejournal.org/dreamweavers-tribal-college-presidents-build-institutions-bridging-worlds/>
- Boyer, P. (1995). Tribal college of the future. *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, XII(1), 8-17.
- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of indigenous education*. Kivaki Press.
- Calvert, C. (2014). *Portraits of women's leadership after participation in a culturally-based university tribal college partnership* (Publication No. 3672748) [Doctoral dissertation, Antioch University].
<https://aura.antioch.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069&context=etds>
- Campbell, M. H. (2003). *Leadership styles of successful tribal college presidents*. University of Montana.
- Caporuscio, J. (2020). *Everything you need to know about white fragility*.
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/white-fragility-definition>
- Castle, K., & Rogers, K. (1993). Rule-creating in a constructivist classroom community. *Childhood Education*, 70(2), 77. (EJ476414). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ476414>

- Chapman, T. K. (2005). Expressions of “voice” in portraiture. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(1), 27-51.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800404270840>
- Christopher, S., Watts, V., McCormick, A., & Young, S. (2008). Building and maintain trust in a community-based participatory research partnership. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98, 1398-1406.
- Crazy Bull, C. (2007). Leadership and wellness go hand in hand. *Tribal College Journal*, 18(4), 52-53. <https://tribalcollegejournal.org/leadership-wellness-hand-hand/>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research* (2nd ed.) Sage.
- Cross, S., Day, A., & Farrell, P. (2011). American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamilies: The impact on child development. In M. C. Sarche, P. Spicer, P. Farrell, & H. E. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *American Indian and Alaska Native children and mental health: Development, context, prevention, and treatment* (pp. 43-62). Praeger/ABC-CLIO.
- Crow, S., & Paetz, K. (2013). Tribal colleges and universities in the 21st century: Native American female leadership in tribal higher education. *ProQuest LLC*. (ED562928). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED562928>
- Cupchik, G. (2001). Constructivist realism: An ontology that encompasses positivist and constructivist approaches to the social sciences. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-2.1.968>
- Demmert, W. G., Jr. (2005). The influences of culture on learning and assessment among Native American students. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20(1), 16-23.
- Dempsey, H. A. (2010). Blackfoot confederacy. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/blackfoot-nation>

- Dewey, J. (1897). My pedagogic creed. *The School Journal*, 54(3), 77-80.
- Doddington, C., Heilbronn, R., & Higham, R. (2018). John Dewey's democracy and education 100 years on. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 52(2), 284-286.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12285>
- Drabiak-Syed, K. (2010). Lessons from Havasupai tribe v. Arizona state university board of regents: recognizing group, cultural, and dignity harms as legitimate risks warranting integration into research practice. *J. Health & Biomedical L.*, 6, 175.
- Dyer, S. (2005). Hurricane puts Louisiana higher ed leadership to the test. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, 22(17), 24-25. (EJ762814). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ762814>
- Edwards, R., & I'Anson, J. (2020). Using artifacts and qualitative methodology to explore pharmacy students' learning practices. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1), 7082. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7082>
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Chapter 3: Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25(1), 99-125. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X025001099>
- Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Pearson.
- Gram, J. R. (2016). Acting out assimilation: Playing indian and becoming American in the federal indian boarding schools. *American Indian Quarterly*, 40(3), 251-273.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/amerindiquar.40.3.0251>
- Guba, E. G. (1981). ERIC/ECTJ annual review paper: Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology*, 29(2), 75-91.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30219811>

- Guzmán, T. (2020). *Native American heritage month*. <https://www.unco.edu/equity-inclusion/communications/native-american-heritage-month20.aspx>
- Hackmann, D. G. (2002). Using portraiture in educational leadership research. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 5(1), 51-60
- Harrison, S. (2019). “We need new stories”: Trauma, storytelling, and the mapping of environmental injustice in Linda Hogan’s solar storms and standing rock. *American Indian Quarterly*, 43(1), 1-35.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331666417_We_Need_New_Stories_Trauma_Storytelling_and_the_Mapping_of_Environmental_Injustice_in_Linda_Hogan's_Solar_Storms_and_Standing_Rock
- Haskie, J., & Shreve, B. (2018). Remembering Diné College: Origin stories of America's first tribal college. *Tribal College Journal*, 30(1), 20-21.
- Hazard, L. A. (2014). *Changing public health policy in Vermont with newborn hearing screening for homebirth families: Midwives' perceptions* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Vermont]. https://library.uvm.edu/collections/theses?search_type=item&bid=2994854
- History. (2019). *Indian reservations*. <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/indian-reservations>
- Kallem, M. (2021). *School of public health spotlights generational trauma in Indigenous communities*. <https://www.jhunewsletter.com/article/2021/10/school-of-public-health-spotlights-generational-trauma-in-indigenous-communities>

- Katz, J. R., Barbosa-Leiker, C., & Benavides-Vaello, S. (2016). Measuring the success of a pipeline program to increase nursing workforce diversity. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 32*(1), 6-14.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S875572231500071X#!>
- Kohn, A. (1999). *The schools our children deserve: Moving beyond traditional classrooms and tougher standards*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Kohn, A. (2000). Standardized testing and its victims. *Education Week, 20*(4), 46-47.
<https://alfiekohn.org/teaching/pdf/Standardized%20Testing%20and%20Its%20Victims.pdf>
- Kovach, M. (2005). Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance* (pp. 19-36). Canadian Scholars' Press
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-12.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3876731>
- Lajimodiere, D. K. (2019). *Stringing rosaries: The unforgivable, and the healing of northern plains American indian boarding school survivors* (1st ed.). North Dakota State University Press.
- Lapier, R. (2016). Smudging: Plants, purification and prayer. *Montana Naturalist, 16*-17.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983). *The good high school: Portraits of culture and character*. Basic Books
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1986). On goodness in schools: Themes of empowerment. *Peabody Journal of Education, 63*(3), 9-28

- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2005). Reflections on portraiture: A dialogue between art and science. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(2), 3-15.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2016). Portraiture methodology: Blending art and science. *Learning Landscapes*, 9(2), 19-27.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Hoffmann Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. Jossey-Bass.
- Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 4(3), 324.
- MacDonald, J. (1998). *The arctic sky: Inuit astronomy, star lore, and legend* (1st ed). The Royal Ontario Museum and the Nunavut Research Institute.
- Mace, R. (2013). *Writing ourselves: The reclamation and preservation of Native American identity in literature*. St. John's University.
- Makomenaw, M. (2014). Goals family and community: What drives tribal college transfer student success. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 51(4), 380-391.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2014-0039>
- Malhotra, S. (2013). The silence in my belly: Memory, healing, power. In A. Carillo Rowe S. Mallotra (Eds.), *Silence, feminism, power: Reflections at the edge of sound* (pp. 219-229). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mankiller, W. (2011). *Every day is a good day: Reflections by contemporary indigenous women*. Fulcrum Pub.
- Manette, G. (2004, June). Leadership, money could carry college across the digital divide. *Tribal College*, 15(4) 26-27.

- Manson, S. M., Garroutte, E., Goins, R. T., & Henderson, P. N. (2004). Access, relevance, and control in the research process: lessons from Indian country. *Journal of Aging and Health, 16*(5 Suppl), 58S-77S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0898264304268149>
- McKinley, B., Brayboy, J., & Chin, J. (2018). A match made in heaven: Tribal critical race theory and critical indigenous research methodologies. In *Understanding critical race research methods and methodologies* (pp. 51-63). Routledge.
- McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. S. (2003, March-April). The development and consequences of stereotype consciousness in middle childhood. *Child Development, 74*(2), 498-515.
- McLeod, M. (2002). Keeping the circle strong: Learning about Native American leadership. *Tribal College Journal, 13*(4), 10-13.
- Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, B. G., & Roehrig, G. (2018). Indigenous cultural contexts for STEM experiences: Snow snakes' impact on students and the community. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 13*(1), 31-58. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-016-9738-4>
- Milner, H. R. (2012). Beyond a test score: Explaining opportunity gaps in educational practice. *Journal of Black Studies, 43*(6), 693-718. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934712442539>
- Molnar, A. (1989). Racism in America: A continuing dilemma. *Educational Leadership, 47*(2), 71-72.
- Momper, S. L., Dennis, M. K., & Mueller-Williams, A. C. (2017). American Indian elders share personal stories of alcohol use with younger tribal members. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse, 16*(3), 293-313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2016.1196633>

- Motohashi, E. P. (2018). A crisis of confidence: One Japanese educator's pedagogical and philosophical struggle to enact ethical and individualized practices in her classroom and beyond. *Thresholds in Education*, 41(1), 3-19.
https://academyedstudies.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/motohashi_final.pdf
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.
- Noddings, N. (1994). Conversation as moral education. *Journal of Moral Education* 23(2), 107-18
- Noddings, N. (2002). *Educating moral people*. Teachers College Press.
- O'Hanley, H. (2014). THE BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP. *Arts and Activities*, 156(2), 14.
<https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/docview/1566173430?accountid=12832>
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Frels, R. K., & Hwang, E. (2016). Mapping Saldaña's coding methods onto the literature review process. *Journal of Electronic Imaging*, 2, 130-150.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- "Piikani Nation Culture and History." (n.d.). http://www.native-languages.org/piikani_culture.htm
- Quigley, C., Trauth-Nare, A., & Beeman-Cadwallader, N. (2015). The viability of portraiture for science education research: Learning from portraits of two science classrooms. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)*, 28(1), 21-49.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2013.847507>
- Raskin, J. D. (2002). Constructivism in psychology: Personal construct psychology, radical constructivism, and social constructionism. *American communication journal*, 5(3), 1-25.

“Region lesson overview.” (n.d.). Colorado Department of Education.

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cosocialstudies/regionlessonoverview>

Richardson, J. W., & McLeod, S. (2011). Technology Leadership in Native American Schools.

Journal of Research in Rural Education, 26(7). <http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/26-7.pdf>.

Risen, C. (2021, October 20). Earl Old Person, Chief of the Blackfeet Nation, dies at 92. *New*

York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/20/us/earl-old-person-dead.html>

Ross, M., & Green, M. F. (2000). The American college president.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Seltiz, C., Wrightsman, L. C., & Cook, W. S. (1976). *Research methods in social relations* (3rd

ed.). Holt Rinehart & Winston.

Smith, C. (2008). Our spirits don't speak English: Indian boarding school. *The Booklist*, 105(4),

76. [https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-](https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/trade-journals/our-spirits-dont-speak-english-indian-boarding/docview/235628057/se-2?accountid=12832)

[com.unco.idm.oclc.org/trade-journals/our-spirits-dont-speak-english-indian-](https://unco.idm.oclc.org/trade-journals/our-spirits-dont-speak-english-indian-boarding/docview/235628057/se-2?accountid=12832)

[boarding/docview/235628057/se-2?accountid=12832](https://unco.idm.oclc.org/trade-journals/our-spirits-dont-speak-english-indian-boarding/docview/235628057/se-2?accountid=12832)

Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*.

Bloomsbury Publishing.

Stull, G., Spyridakis, D., Gasman, M., Samayoa, A., & Booker, Y. (2015). *Redefining success:*

How tribal colleges and universities build nations, strengthen sovereignty, and persevere through Challenges. Center for Minority Serving Institutions.

https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1386&context=gse_pubs

Trafzer, C. E., Keller, J. A., & Sisquoc, L. (2006). *Boarding school blues: Revisiting American*

Indian educational experiences. University of Nebraska Press.

“Urban Indian population.” (n.d.). <https://ccia.colorado.gov/tribes/urban-indian-population>

Wakshul, B. (1997). Training leaders for the 21st Century: The American Indian ambassadors program, medicine pathways for the future. *Winds of Change*, 12(2), 24-28.

Ward, C., Jepson, S. J., Jones, K. W., & Littlebear, R. E. (2014). Making math count: Tribal college leadership in education reform on the northern Cheyenne reservation. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 38(3), 107.

<https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.38.3.xg78874811842n73>

Zeilinger, R. (1986). *The meaning of the four directions in Native American culture*.

<https://www.stjo.org/native-american-culture/native-american-beliefs/four-directions/>

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Date: 04/02/2021

Principal Investigator: Jessica Buckless

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 04/02/2021

Protocol Number: 2102021832

Protocol Title: A PORTRAITURE OF TWO TRIBAL COLLEGE LEADERS

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(7)(2) for research involving

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:



- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - <http://hhs.gov/ohrp/> and <https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Morse". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN
COLORADO

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TITLE: A PORTRAITURE OF TWO TRIBAL COLLEGE LEADERS

Principal Investigator: Jessica Buckless, Ed.D. Candidate
University of Northern Colorado

Faculty Advisor: Christy McConnell, Ph.D.
University of Northern Colorado

You are invited to participate in a research study about: Tribal College Leadership.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in two observations and an informal interview in a work setting. The two observations will be up to you to decide on what you would like the researcher to see. They could be large group/work meetings or 1 meetings with individuals. The researcher will take notes and use the methodology of portraiture where you as a participant have the ability to build with the researcher, so that the portrait accurately depicts you as the participant.

Benefits of the research: This research will benefit further understanding of each tribal college leader and tribal college leadership as a whole.

Compensation: The researcher will give each participant a beaded item for participation.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please take your time to read and thoroughly review this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep or print this form for your records. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO; 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu.

We will protect the confidentiality of your research records by keeping all recorded interview transcripts and written notes on a password protected computer.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact Jessica Buckless at buck3563@bears.unco.edu or Faculty Advisor: Christy McConnell at christine.mcconnell@unco.edu

Participant's Full Name/Signature

Date

Researcher's Full Name/Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TRIBAL COLLEGE
PRESIDENTS**

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TCU PRESIDENTS

1. How have the cultural and life experiences of two Tribal college presidents influenced their roles as leaders?

- a. What are the characteristics of career paths that you followed in your journey to becoming a TCP?
- b. Thinking back to your childhood days, what was a career dream of yours?
 - (1) Why was this a dream of yours?
 - (2) Did your childhood dreams influence your path in becoming a TCP?
- c. How did your culture influence your path to becoming a TCP?
- d. Tell me about how cultural oral history has impacted your life. How about as a TCP?
- e. What does culture mean to you? Is that present in your decision-making in and out of a work setting?
- f. Describe a challenge that you have encountered along your career path as a Native person.
 - (1). Has this influenced your path as a TCP?

2. What have been the most influential experiences in the lives of two Tribal college presidents?

- a. How has your childhood contributed to where you are today?
- b. What barriers did you encounter as you pursued your goal of becoming a TCP?
- c. Tell me about your relationships with faculty and students at your TC?
- d. Name one elder that has influenced you the most in your life. Why?

3. What research and innovation have been the most influential on Tribal college presidents' leadership decisions?

- a. Why are TC's important?
- b. What do you perceive to be the most important presidential leadership skills and characteristics required to guide TC's?

- c. What supports do you have that have assisted you in obtaining your position as a TCP?
 - d. What values are most important to you in your work?
- 4. What is the significance of the Tribal college president's histories/stories for the communities that they serve, as well as for higher education in general?**
- a. How have your leadership skills developed over your time as a TCP?
 - b. How have lessons from your Tribal community guided your leadership as a TCP?
 - c. Did you grow up on your home reservation? If yes, what was it like? How is it different now?
 - d. How were you personally impacted by your local TC growing up?
 - (1) How did this impact your path to becoming a TCP?