

Epistemologies and Enactments of Self-Determination in South Dakota

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF MINNESOTA  
BY

Abby Marie Menter

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Roozbeh Shirazi, Co-Advisor  
Dr. Elizabeth Sumida Huaman, Co-Advisor

June 2024

© Abby Marie Menter 2024

## Acknowledgements

There are not enough words to express the gratitude I feel for the love and support I have received throughout this process. This doctoral journey has been interlaced with loss, grief, a global pandemic, and a roller-coaster of emotions. To live at a time where schools are battlegrounds of the political sphere, where the State continues to attempt to marginalize and harm young people on the basis of their race, class, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation, and where the right of young people to merely exist as their full authentic selves is under constant threat is both infuriating and, it seems, the historical and continued reality of schooling in the so-called United States. To continue to fight through the fatigue, anger, and grief and to instead choose to hope and create is not something I have ever done (nor could ever do) in isolation. I am grateful for the friends and family with whom I have been afforded the gifts of listening, dreaming, critiquing, thinking, and acting. I offer gratitude to my family, Christine, Julie, and Lisa, who have always supported my desire to see the world as it could be; To Josie, Sarah, Curtis, Sonia, Tara, Dan, Anna, and the TFA South Dakota staff, who have fueled my soul and my mind; To the LIIE Cohort at UMN, whose continued support and encouragement have been a gift; To Oskate Win, Kat, and Steven, without whom I would have been lost during the pandemic; To Jenn, Ryan, Tate, Matt, Bino, Charles, and Samantha who allow me the space to breathe; To Nora, Rosemary, the SGU staff, and the Higher Education Research Review Board at SGU who have embraced this work from the beginning and dedicated countless hours to setting up the structures needed; To the families and staff at the Todd County School District, who welcomed, embraced, and pushed me; And to Amy, Alex, and Alyssa, who have always held sacred space for my heart.

My committee has been a constant source of support and inspiration throughout this process. Dr. St.Clair, your generosity, wisdom, and care are deeply felt. Dr. DeJaeghere, your curiosity, kindness, and warmth are inspiring. And to my advisors, Dr. Shirazi and Dr. Sumida Huaman, there are no words to express how grateful I am for your guidance, your careful and generous critique, and your willingness to continually create space and time for me over the past seven years. Thank you for believing in the spirit of this work, for being able to *see* it, and for supporting me while I slowly, but surely, created something that I can be proud of.

## **Dedications**

For my students and the teachers who have worked without end to create something different.

## **Abstract**

In the State of South Dakota, and across the so-called United States in general, political forces continue to attempt to control Indigenous identity, land relationships, and power, despite the characterization of the current policy era as one of Tribal Self-Determination. This critical ethnographic study examines the ways in which these policies are felt and experienced as acts of coloniality and continued attempts at racial and cultural erasure. Epistemologies of decoloniality, however, serve as sources of resistance to hegemonic state violence. The findings of this study explore the main epistemic frames that educators and other education stakeholders use to situate their opposition to coloniality, thereby creating a vision for self-determination that is distinct from that of the federal government. In this study, three main themes emerged as ways in which educators and education stakeholders epistemically de-link from colonial constructions of Indigenous education, each of which forms a unique pedagogical perspective that guides both theory and practice. These pedagogies, of relationality, of resistance, and of sustenance, act as the ways in which some educators establish counter-hegemonic discourses, practices, and outcomes in their work.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	viii
A Note on Language Used .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction and Statement of the Problem .....	1
Study Purpose and Overview.....	3
Conceptual Framework.....	5
From Independence to Self-Determination: An Overview of Federal Indian Policy .....	14
The History of Indigenous Education is a History of Resistance.....	24
Indian Education Now: What the Data Say.....	32
Significance of the Study.....	36
Self-Determination Policy Enactment in the Context of Comparative International Development Education.....	37
Limitations and Delimitations .....	39
Conclusion and Summary of Remaining Chapters.....	42
Chapter 2: Review of Literature.....	44
Introduction .....	44
Part I: What are the Policy Tensions that Characterize Education and Schooling in Indigenous South Dakota?.....	46
Part II: How do scholars, Elders, knowledge holders and others define the relationship between these “tensions” (identity, land relationships, and power) in transforming schooling? .....	71

	vi
Summary and Implications for Research.....	95
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods .....	99
Methodology: The Journey to (Critical) Ethnography).....	100
Methods .....	112
Process .....	118
Ethical Considerations .....	131
Limitations and Delimitations .....	132
Participant Characteristics and Introductions .....	133
Conclusion .....	142
Chapter 4: Findings, Part 1: Hegemony and Coloniality in Present	
Schooling Systems .....	144
Overview of the Study .....	144
“Well, no wonder our state’s in a shit shambles”: Shared Experiences	
On the Current State of Indigenous Education .....	147
“It feels like a big ol’ game”: Policymakers and Policies .....	151
“What are we doing to our kids?”: Education and Educators .....	183
Chapter 5: Findings, Part 2: Pedagogies of Relationality, Resistance, and Sustenance as	
Decolonial Process.....	199
“My mom said you’re my auntie”: Relationality and Protective Care.....	200
“People are fed up”: Resistance and Advocacy.....	215
“It’s not just self-determination. You’re also determining with everyone else”:	
Sustenance and Community Perpetuity .....	226
Conclusion .....	235

Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	237
Research question part 1: What is the relationship between Tribal Self-Determination Policies and Enactments, Tribal-Serving School, and Tribal and Non-Tribal Education Stakeholders in South Dakota?.....	237
Research question part 2: What Does this Dynamic Illuminate About the Story of Educational Development for Indigenous Students in the State?.....	240
Theoretical Discussion .....	242
Implications for Research.....	246
Implications for Practice.....	249
Conclusion .....	252
References.....	253
Appendix: Interview Guide.....	280

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Methods Overview.....	112
--------------------------------	-----

### **A Note on Language Used**

Throughout this paper, I use several terms to reference Indigeneity. As a non-Indigenous woman, the decision about what terms to use and not use had to be deeply intentional. In many places, I use the term “Federal Indian Education policy” or “Indian Education policy” in reference to legislative eras, documents, etc. Historically, the United States and state governments have used the term “Indian” to define Indigenous peoples. More contemporarily, the distinctions of American Indian and Alaska Native are legal designations used by the US Census and other government agencies. This designation, however, is steeped in colonial ideology and often omits individuals who are not enrolled in a Tribal nation or whose Tribal nations are not federally recognized by the United States government. I made the decision to utilize this terminology as a vehicle to recognize the inherent colonial nature of the policies themselves. In many other areas of the paper, I use the identifiers Native American and Indigenous interchangeably. While these are not necessarily synonymous terms, many individuals have a strong preference for how they choose to identify themselves. Out of respect for these self-identifications, I have chosen to use both.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### Introduction and Statement of the Problem

In the heart of the Black Hills of South Dakota, sacred lands to the Oceti Sakowin and other Indigenous nations of the Great Plains, millions of tourists journey each year to visit the desecrated Six Grandfathers Mountain. In its present form, the mountain is host to the faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt and is widely considered a symbol of American democracy and freedom. Mount Rushmore, as it is now called, was brought into existence on land that was stolen from the Lakota Nation (*United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, 1980), sculpted and designed by a man connected to the Ku Klux Klan (Shaer, 2016), and celebrates four white men whose legacies regarding Federal policies towards Native Americans could only be considered paternalistic (at best) (McKeever, 2020). Mount Rushmore has been a celebrated beacon of freedom for decades, but has also been a site of ongoing vocal resistance and demonstrated opposition to American imperialism. Most recently, in 2020, then-president Donald Trump used it as the location for his Independence Day address, in defiance of Covid-19 pandemic precautions and rising case numbers in the state of South Dakota. Amidst chants of “USA! USA! USA!,” Trump heralded the “heroes” represented on the mountain, as he conjured up images of “a revolution in the pursuit of justice, equality, liberty, and prosperity” (Trump, 2020). Protesters gathered along the highway to Mount Rushmore to demonstrate their opposition to Trump’s visit and to call for the return of the Black Hills, which were designated as part of the “Great Sioux Nation” in the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty (Treaty of Fort Laramie, 1868), to the Lakota people. Twenty protesters (and one counter-protester) were arrested at the demonstration,

including one who was charged with a class four felony for taking a shield from a National Guard soldier and spray painting it with the words “Land Back” (Kaczke, 2020). This brief moment in history represents a centuries-long battle between colonial ideology (and the actions that result from it) and Indigenous sovereignty. The relationship between Indigenous nations in the so-called United States and the federal and state governments that occupy the same lands has long been tumultuous, at best, as a result of the actions (mis)informed by colonial ideologies and practices. While Indigenous nations and peoples have always exercised their sovereign rights to self-determination, federal and state policymakers have intentionally acted to attempt to limit, control, and define sovereignty and self-determination on behalf of Tribes. In the instance described above, this took the form of a militarized response to the call for treaty rights to be honored, and incredibly harsh legal consequences for the individuals making demands of their government (all while policymakers and their supporters praised American values and democracy on the other side of the protest). We currently live in a policy era characterized by Tribal Self-Determination (which will be expounded upon later in this chapter), and yet policymakers and their policies intentionally act to limit the exercising of Tribal sovereignty.

Specifically within the context of education practice and policy, this same colonial ideology has long been exercised under the premise and promise of “development” of and “self-determination” for Indigenous nations, while simultaneously promoting both explicit and implicit goals of assimilation and/or termination. Within recent decades, literature on Indigenous education has identified this ideological set of beliefs and the educational practices that have resulted from them as harmful to

Indigenous students today, but also as a necessary site of epistemic and educational resistance. Recommended approaches to this resistance vary widely but are frequently considered by Indigenous scholars to be necessary for and connected to Indigenous educational revitalization and sovereignty, self-governance, and self-determination (Lomawaima, 1999). Concurrently, within the field of Critical Policy Studies, scholars have examined the relationships between ideology, language, and policy (Fischer et al., 2015) and the roles of power and positionality in the negotiation and enactment of policies (Maguire et al., 2015). While these two fields are not necessarily in consistent conversation with one another, I believe they could (and should) be in order to understand how schooling is implicated in Indigenous self-determination and what possibilities are created for sovereignty in the process of policy enactment. Given the present call within Indigenous education to challenge dominant colonial educational practices and policies in conjunction with the state-sanctioned persistence of those exact policies and practices, there is a need to develop a robust understanding of how and why educators of Indigenous students (and other education stakeholders) navigate and understand their roles in the policy enactment process. As such, the central research questions of this dissertation are: What is the relationship between Tribal Self-Determination policies and enactments, Tribal-serving schools, and Tribal and non-Tribal education stakeholders in South Dakota, and what does this dynamic illuminate about the story of educational development for Indigenous students in the state?

### **Study Purpose and Overview**

The study is designed to explore the relationships between policies and enactments in the context of Tribal Self-Determination and conceptualizations of

Indigenous self-determination. The difference between these two terms will be explored later in this chapter. Specifically, the study is intended to understand how educators, education stakeholders, and Indigenous students navigate the colonial practices of state and federal policymaking, how they think about their roles in the policy enactment process, and the decisions that are made regarding Indigenous education as a result. There is a baseline assumption in this study, substantiated by a review of both the current policy context and literature, that colonial ideologies are embedded in policymaking at the state and federal levels, and that individuals involved in enacting these policies make intentional and unintentional choices that impact the development of Indigenous education.

Utilizing a critical ethnographic approach rooted in conceptualizations of both Critical Indigenous Education and Critical Policy Studies, and with a decolonial theoretical lens, I visited with educators, former students, and education stakeholders within the context of Tribal education in one reservation community in South Dakota. Additionally, I engaged in observation of public education policymaking spaces and analysis of policy documents. This approach has allowed me to examine the ways in which policy decisions are embedded in the lives of the individuals who are responsible for enacting them and the ways in which ideologies inform those enactments. It has also provided a great deal of insight into how individuals make meaning of their roles, priorities, and the risks they are willing to take in the name of self-determination. The remaining pages of this chapter will provide further historical, social, and political context for the problem briefly described here through an overview of the following: 1.) The conceptual framework utilized in this study, 2.) Federal Indian policy with specific,

but not exclusive, emphasis on education policy, 3.) Current Indigenous education policy in the state of South Dakota (which serves as the site for this research) 4.) Practices of resistance and self-determination, and 5.) Current misalignment between policies, their (stated) intended outcomes, and current educational realities for Indigenous students in South Dakota. My intention in providing this context is to examine the policy context of South Dakota, its origins, and its current manifestations and impacts. Because broader federal Indian policy has often informed education policymaking at the state and national levels, these will be explored in conversation with one another. In the subsequent chapter, I will explore the main areas of ideological dissonance in state and federal education policies as they impact Indigenous youth through the lens of both policy and Indigenous perspectives. These epistemic tensions serve as the main points of negotiation that Indigenous education stakeholders navigate. This will serve as the review of literature in an effort to more concretely identify the specific epistemic grounds upon which policies have been both created and resisted, historically and contemporarily, as well as to provide clarity on the tensions that educators and education stakeholders must navigate in their work with Indigenous students.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study conceptually centers notions of coloniality within decolonial theory as it has been explored by Casanova (1965), Quijano (2007), Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009), Maldonado-Torres (2016), Valenzuela (2019), and Cusicanqui (2012) among others. The concept of coloniality differs from colonialism, which refers to “a formal system of political domination by Western European societies over others,” (Quijano, 2007, p. 168). Colonialism, therefore, is considered to refer to a point in historical time.

Coloniality, on the other hand, refers to a power structure that was created by developing the particular practices of discrimination that maintain hierarchical systems of power today (Quijano, 2007). Tlostanova and Mignolo and others have classified these power systems into four distinct realms, each a mechanism by which dominating forces seek to control non-dominant peoples. These include: economic control, authority, public sphere, and knowledge/subjectivity (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). Within education, control of knowledge and subjectivity can occur through eurocentric curricula (Valenzuela, 2019) which are often grounded in “a history and epistemology of settler colonialism and the ‘curricular genocide’ that it reflects” (Valenzuela, 2019, p. 199). A number of Indigenous education scholars have examined how curricular materials in education spaces play a role in the deculturalization of Indigenous students (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) and whether or not professional development changes can improve educators’ culturally responsive practices (Savage et al., 2011). Regardless, there is general agreement that schooling plays a central role in the continued maintenance of oppressive systems by attempting to center Western knowledge systems and decenter the localized knowledges and ways of being of Indigenous communities. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) refer to the “control of knowledge and subjectivity” as “the fundamental sphere of control that makes domination possible” (p. 135). In the context of Indian Education as a formal set of federal policy structures in the United States, the same has proven true, with education utilized as a fundamental sphere of control through which assimilation and termination efforts were attempted (Szasz, 1999). Although the concept of coloniality has gone through different iterations at different points in time, it has been rooted in visions of non-Christian and nondominant populations as in need of conversion, development, or

civilization (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). These approaches to coloniality are echoed in the overview of federal Indian Education policy later in this chapter.

The overlap between the history of Indian Education in the United States (and South Dakota, specifically), both historically and contemporarily, and the concept of education as a vehicle for attempted domination under the premise of “development” is unignorable. Mignolo (2007), however, calls for an “epistemic delinking” to separate our thinking and ways of being from coloniality. Cusicanqui (2012) and Valenzuela (2019), argue that Indigenous communities have long been engaging in the practice of “delinking” through collective resistance and practices of self-determination. The processes by which Indigenous communities and peoples enact their resistance to hegemonic education institutions vary but can include a re-defining of knowledge on their own terms as a form of active rebellion and refusal of colonial power. As Honig (2021) states, “Indigenous theories of refusal, for example, have argued in favor of developing or recommitting to their own sovereignties rather than working to ameliorate or infiltrate those of settler societies” (pp. 1-2).

Indigenous education scholar Bryan Brayboy writes extensively about the role of colonization in education, specifically that “Governmental policies and educational policies towards Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429), and has made arguments, alongside others, that research that attempts to remedy this through examining the incorporation of cultural practices in schooling has been insufficient because that research “is too easily reduced to essentializations, meaningless generalizations, or trivial anecdotes—none of which result in systemic, institutional, or lasting changes to schools serving Indigenous youth”

(Castagno and Brayboy, 2008, p. 941). This dissonance can be traced to the concept, represented in both theories of coloniality and Indigenous education, that racism and colonization are endemic to society (Brayboy, 2005; Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016; Sleeter, 2017; Stanton, 2019).

Given the agreement amongst scholars of decolonial theory and Critical Indigenous Education that colonial ideologies are embedded in the educational decision-making practices of policymakers and education stakeholders, this study requires an approach to interpreting education policy that allows for multiple subjectivities and interpretations in the policy enactment process. As a framework for understanding the range of conceptualizations of s/Self-Determination that inform education stakeholders' interpretations of education policy, this study conceptually utilizes Critical Policy Studies (CPS). As an approach to policy analysis, CPS places emphasis on policy processes, "not only in terms of apparent inputs and outputs, but more importantly in terms of the interests, values, and normative assumptions--political and social--that shape and inform these processes" (Fischer et al., 2015, p. 1). This field concerns itself largely with the formation of knowledge that is used to both shape and enact policies and rejects the idea that policy analysis, formation, and enactment can be neutral. Similarly, Shore and Wright (1997) argue that policies, in fact, shape societies including how knowledge is constructed, expressed, and enacted. Central to this argument is the notion that policies are not neutral and can be read instead as "cultural texts, as classificatory devices with various meanings, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present, or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some people and silence others" (p. 7). Perhaps most directly related to this study, Michael Lipsky (2010)

examines the role that teachers (among other ‘street-level bureaucrats’) play in forming public policy through their actions. In his work, it is the enactment of policy that most informs it. For example, he argues that the conditions of education (in this example) require educators to develop coping mechanisms that tend to continue services to those deemed “most favorable” and limit services to students who may seem “unteachable.” His argument is that this often interferes with the intent of policies or legislation. I would add that the knowledge and context that educators use to determine who is “teachable” or not is of particular importance here, and that this knowledge is socially constructed as part of the legacy and continuation of colonization. There is a clear trend in the subjective nature of policy enactment amongst these scholars.

While some scholars articulate that policy is informed by social constructions of knowledge (Fischer et al., 2015) and others articulate that these knowledge constructions are themselves informed by policies (Shore & Wright, 1997), they are generally in agreement that the policy process is not neutral, and is in some way connected with how individuals live, act, and think. Maguire et al. (2015) explore the ways in which subjectivities and positionality impact policy decisions. “There will be multiple subjectivities and positions that will shape how policies are understood, and differences will occur in enactments over time and in different spatial contexts” (p. 487). They argue that enacting policies is a process of socially-constructed sense-making, complex and fragile in nature, and constantly shifting over time. For the purposes of this study, Critical Policy Studies offers a lens to understand how policy actors use their collective and individual agency to adopt particular educational practices and interpret their role(s) in s/Self-Determination, including the role that local context plays in informing these

understandings and enactments. CPS also provides a framework for understanding the extent to which social conditions and sociohistorical context inform the vision that policy actors hold for s/Self-Determination and/or the ways in which these policies themselves create and/or maintain a sociohistorical context rooted in colonial inequity.

Koyama (2012) explores part of this phenomenon in response to one school's experience with No Child Left Behind policy requirements. She examines how different individuals within the school system understood and negotiated the school's designation as "failing" in enacting their roles to understand why and how policy actors utilize their agency. She noted that there are major gaps between policy texts, the intentions of policies, and the effects of those policies. In her study, subjectivity, interpretation, and positionality played major roles in determining the ways in which policy reform initiatives were enacted.

In South Dakota, the gaps between policy texts, intentions, and effects seem less expansive, with policies often deploying political rhetoric in order to work against Indigenous interests. In the example of several of the Oceti Sakowin Schools bills that will be described later in this chapter, this rhetoric took the form of relying on anti-charter school discourse, despite the fact that the bills were not blanket charter legislation. "It's not fair to the children of this state to start down this charter school project program, where we take money from all those other kids to benefit a few" (Schoenbeck in Vondracek, 2021, para. 3). At a later time, another policymaker within the same political party as Schoenbeck argued that she was, in fact, in favor of school choice but did not like the word "equity" being included in the conversation (Provide for the Creation and Funding of Oceti Sakowin Community-Based Schools, 2022, 1:52:00).

Other policymakers argued that “integration” is working and thus there is no need for Oceti Sakowin Community Schools (Novstrup in Vondracek, 2021, para. 12). By reducing the desire for Indigenously-designed schools that focus on culturally-defined priorities to a conversation on integration/segregation and economic fairness, policymakers effectively dodged questions about educational inequity in the state, placing blame for that very inequity back on Indigenous-serving schools, and positioning themselves as champions of equity. In this particular case, the gap between policy text, intentions, and impacts is complex. While the schools were not funded, Indigenous educators continue to find new ways to resist hegemonic governmental practices and policies through the creation of privately-funded education programs and schools, and through the continued pressure for the state to acknowledge the many ways it has failed Indigenous students.

Certainly, as in Koyama’s study, subjectivities, positionality, and interpretation have major impacts on how policies are designed, interpreted, and enacted. Finally, Takeda and Williams (2018) explored the concept of macro-level ideologies’ impacts on policy reform efforts, specific to Indigenous education in Japan and Canada. They found that states “approach diversity based on differing concepts of the nation-state and different experiences of state formation” (p. 86), which directly connects to my study here in that states and schools approach the work of equity based on differing conceptualizations of s/Self-Determination. They found that reforms rooted in constructions of citizenship did little to address the plurality of identities relevant in multicultural education initiatives. In the case of this study, reforms rooted in the political definition of Self-Determination do little to address and respond to Indigenous

conceptualizations of self-determination, sovereignty, and self-governance. The changes to policy in both Japan and Canada, over time, are not dissimilar from those in the United States. Initially rooted in assimilatory intent, control over Indigenous education in these countries has shifted, slowly, to allow for more autonomy by Indigenous communities over their education structures, however this “autonomy” is still dictated by state and federal aims, particularly when it comes to Indian Education policy.

The challenges addressed by these authors are also similar. “There are many issues to be sorted out, such as the balance between traditional and western science, the need of western skills for economic self-sufficiency, the relevance to the immediate experience of Native children, and the utility of traditional knowledge in job opportunities” (Thomson, 1993 in Takeda & Williams, 2018, p. 86). Essentially, the relationship between Indigenous knowledge systems and contemporary school systems is deeply complex and difficult to navigate. In the United States, questions about what students need to know and why are understood and questioned through many lenses, including college and career readiness, the traumatic history of boarding schools, the use of traditional knowledge in the current world, academic achievement, socioemotional and sociopolitical consciousness, and many more. These lenses, at times, seem almost irreconcilable to the point that they are often used as arguments against tribal s/Self-Determination, without much effort to complicate them. Takeda and Williams (2018), on the other hand, argue for a new model rooted in multicultural pluralism. “In this model, civic and ethnic notions construct multilayered identities (Mahajan, 2002). Individuals are recognized both as citizens...but also members of communities" (p.87). Within Indian Education, this could be interpreted to complicate the conversation on the role of schools,

educators, and content. Conceptualized through the lens of citizenship, whether of the United States or of a Tribal nation, notions of Self-Determination may seem to require that young people develop the skills, abilities, and knowledge to engage in democratic society and to ensure the politically sovereign future of the Tribe. On the other hand, when students are considered as members of communities, a different set of skills and knowledges emerge as integral to community self-determination. Relationality, community care, Indigenous language fluency, and others may rise as priorities under this particular frame. What becomes clear is that there are different visions for Indigenous education that are rooted in different, equally as complex “layers” of students’ identities. These visions elicit differing content, methods, and perspectives in schooling. In terms of policy implications, this “multilayered”ness means that policy actors must consider the cultural, linguistic, traditional, historical, contemporary, and spiritual needs of students. Instead, however, policymakers in South Dakota often rely solely on notions of academic success and western conceptualizations of what students need to know in order to participate in a particular vision of democracy. Rarely, if ever, are students seen as members of asset-rich communities when policies impacting Indigenous education are being formulated. They are, instead, viewed as the incapable “other.” Policymakers perceive them as in need of more direct intervention in order to develop the skills and abilities to contribute to a capitalist economy.

In short, the field of Critical Policy Studies offers approaches to understanding the roles of history, positionality, identity, policy, and agency in determining the effects of policies, as they impact students individually and collectively, through historically situated and contemporary political and cultural lenses. In understanding Self-

Determination policies specifically, it is crucial to consider the ways in which such positionality, history, policy, identity, and agency continue to dictate and define outcomes for Indigenous students. As an example, teachers and other educators make decisions, minute-by-minute, to work towards or against self-determination, and these decisions are embedded within complex histories, relationships, orientations, and belief systems. The content they choose to teach, the ways in which they orient students to one another, the ways in which they navigate their own positional power, their biases, and how students experience their classrooms/schools are all manifestations of these decisions and are all impacted by positionality, identity, and understandings of the history of Indigenous education. Similarly, the policy decisions made at the state level are frequently (if not always) informed by state actors' understandings of history, their willingness to reckon with that history, and the ways in which they understand their own power. These decisions can sometimes become tied up with deeply-held perspectives on land privatization, fragility, racism, and religious beliefs. Critical Policy Studies offers a framework within which to examine the different approaches, interpretations, and policy decisions made by an array of groups, individuals, and systems.

### **From Independence to Self-Determination: An Overview of Federal Indian Policy and Complications**

*"After all, in every other instance when the government had come along with a program that was going to make their lives better, things usually got worse" -Thomas King, 2003, p.134*

In order to more fully understand the policy context of federal Indian Education and statewide education initiatives, this section of this paper will provide a non-exhaustive overview of policies throughout history. These policies collectively form the

basis of educational decision-making and meaning-making today, whether for educators, policymakers, or other stakeholders.

Federal Indian policy within the United States has been characterized by scholars as categorized into distinct eras, each with its own somewhat unique priorities in regard to the relationship between the federal government and Indigenous nations. Within these policies, the term, “Indian,” is typically used and refers to federally recognized tribes that have a government-to-government relationship with the United States. There are currently 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes, however, these nations do not encompass all Indigenous nations in the present-day United States and the concept of federal recognition of a nation’s sovereign status is highly contested and politicized. This complexity will not be explored in this paper but is important in regards to the broader conversation on sovereignty and self-determination.

Two seminal scholars on federal Indian policy, Stephen Pevar (2012) and David Wilkins (2016), have identified distinct policy eras as they relate to the legislative relationship between Tribes and the federal government. While their interpretations of policy eras differ in terminology and slightly in timeline, there is substantial overlap in how they are described. A broad overview of eras is provided below in the form of a synthesis of Pevar and Wilkins’ work. The brief descriptions below do not summarize all of the complexity of each era, nor do they take into account the complexity of resistances of Indigenous peoples broadly. These descriptions do, however, illuminate the general stance that the federal government held towards Indigenous nations in policymaking at specific points in history.

1. 1492-1770s: Tribal independence. Characterized by the relationships between tribal nations and settler societies wherein nations operated as distinct governments, sometimes forming alliances with settlers or one another for different purposes.
2. 1770s-1820s: Agreements between sovereign equals. During this time, the “founding” government of the United States recognized tribal nations as self-governing within its own policies, despite the lack of enforcement of protective laws, a paternalistic government-to-government relationship, and the initiation of westward expansion. During this time, Tribes engaged in some active resistance to federal involvement and policies as well as diplomacy at times.
3. 1828-1887: Removal and Relocation. This era was dominated by a belief that Indigenous peoples could, and must, be removed to lands that were less desired by settlers through treaties that guaranteed permanent lands to Indigenous peoples. This lasted only until those lands were also considered desirable for settlement and resulted in a deeply paternalistic relationship between the federal government and tribal nations and “relocation” of Indigenous peoples to reservations. Tribal involvement included increased armed resistance in the early part of this era, however this began to wane in the later years. There are some instances of negotiation and accommodation, but typically when Tribes were under significant duress. Tribes were declared domestic dependent nations by the United States Supreme Court in 1831, which also limited State authority in Tribal matters.

4. 1887-1934: Allotment and assimilation. Because reservation land was now desirable for white settlement, the federal government adopted a policy stance that, in their minds, justified the taking of land from Indigenous nations, disruption of tribal sovereignty, and attempts to “westernize” Indigenous peoples. The Dawes Act marked a significant shift in policymaking that now focused more wholly on assimilatory practices. Through the Dawes Act, Indigenous peoples were “provided” with allotments of land that were to be used for farming and agriculture. Under the guise of protecting property rights of Tribes, the US government effectively rolled back treaty agreements by creating the conditions for major land losses for Tribes. This era also signaled an end to formal government-to-government treaty-making between Tribes and the Federal government, as Congress no longer recognized Tribes as capable of treaty-making, and in 1903, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress could override treaties made with Indigenous Nations under the premise of plenary power (*Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, 1903). The expansion of western religious practices and values continued as children were forcibly removed from their homes and enrolled in military and boarding schools.
5. 1934-1953: Indian reorganization and Indian self-rule. Beginning with the passing of the Indian Reorganization Act, this era is characterized by a more benevolent paternalism. This era established Indian preference for employment within Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) programs, focused on reorganizing tribal governments (in the image of United States government structures and practices), and allowed for some restoration of reservation lands. Tribal status with the

federal government was seen as quasi-sovereign, wherein the federal government retained self-appointed plenary power in Tribal affairs.

6. 1953-1968: Termination. This era was based on the premise of the Hoover Commission, which recommended the “complete integration” of Indigenous peoples into white society, specifically. Federal benefits and programs offered to tribes were eliminated and “relocation” of Indigenous peoples through vocational training in large cities was an anchoring policy. The term “Termination” is used to signal the end of the government-to-government trust relationship between tribes and the United States, as there was federal movement to dismantle the quasi-sovereign status of tribes and focus on total assimilation into “American” culture, stemming largely from a cold-war fear of socialist programs. Modern Indigenous resistance movements like the American Indian Movement began to take root as both Tribes and Indigenous peoples who had been “relocated” began to organize politically in new ways.
7. 1968-Present: Tribal Self-Determination and self-governance. This era operated under the belief that the policies of the termination era were “inhumane” (Pevar, 2012, p. 12) and the focus of policymaking shifted to focus on restoration of Tribal governments as similar to state and local governments. This included Tribal control over foster care and adoption programs, health, education, and others, however only in certain instances. This stance has had little impact on the judicial branch, with Indigenous interests losing 80% of cases in the Supreme Court since the 1970s. Tribal status as quasi-sovereigns or “domestic dependent

nations,” was restored and Indigenous resistance movements continue(d) to expand.

Policy eras in the context of the relationship between the federal government and Tribal Nations, again, are not all-encompassing nor entirely linear. As described above, however, this relationship has taken several different forms and Tribes have experienced frequent and sometimes dramatic shifts in their status (in the eyes of the federal government). For most of United States history, Tribal nations have been perceived to be a barrier to expansion, progress, and American identity, and policies have been developed accordingly. This is a complex history, and one that is tied up with notions of capitalism, Christian superiority, and white supremacy. This notion will be explored more in-depth in the review of literature.

Within the landscape of U.S. federal Indian education policy, this current policy era, since the 1960s and 70s, has been defined widely by the federal government and Tribal communities as one of “Indian Self-Determination.” As a response to the persistent organizing and resistance efforts of Indigenous nations, the United States has been required to adopt policies that reflect the desires and autonomy of Tribes. However, the majority of federal Indian education policy, historically, has been rooted in attempts to terminate Indigenous peoples, either culturally or physically, and assimilate them into Euro-Christian value systems and ways of living. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the federal government adopted a number of policies that directly funded education programs within Tribal lands, thus establishing a relationship of control over education (Szasz, 1999). Schools in this era could be characterized, according to Lomawaima (1999) by four main tenets:

(1) that Native Americans were savages and had to be civilized; (2) that civilization required Christian conversion; (3) that civilization required subordination of Native communities, frequently achieved through resettlement efforts; and (4) that Native people had mental, moral, physical, or cultural deficiencies that made certain pedagogical methods necessary for their education. (p. 3)

These tenets governed the establishment of boarding schools in the late 1800s, many of which were known for their abusive, military-style disciplinary tactics (Gunderson, 2019) toward the broader purpose to “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (Pratt, 1892, p. 46). This was often communicated through the lens of a “benevolent” paternalism, wherein the United States was able to frame their harsh and often deadly policies through a lens of care and concern. Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School was a staunch opponent of the Office of Indian Affairs as well as of a federally-controlled approach to Indian Education. He saw his school as an opportunity to demonstrate the ability of Native American peoples to assimilate “successfully” into white culture. He opposed explicit genocide but believed in the supremacy of whiteness (Lomawaima & Ostler, 2018). Pratt saw himself as an ally to Native Americans, and someone who was working toward equality. It was this belief coupled with a paternalistic approach that led to an intense recruitment effort, overcrowding at Carlisle, spreading of disease, trauma-inducing assimilation efforts, and the deaths of 293 students between 1879 and 1918 (Lomawaima & Ostler, 2018). While Pratt vocally opposed genocide, the structures he created and maintained were a primary

vehicle for it. A similar mentality and impact can be seen in the “removal” process of the 1830s and after. As Andrew Jackson (1830) stated,

[Removal] will enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and...perhaps, gradually, under the protection of the government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community. (para. 2)

What resulted from Jackson’s intentions to “provide” Tribes with his version of independence from states (but not from the federal government) was a series of forced relocations for a number of Tribes from their ancestral homelands to other unsettled lands, mainly west of the Mississippi River in present-day Oklahoma. These relocations were often arduous, dangerous, and traumatic, resulting in more than 2,000 deaths on the Navajo Long Walk (Burnett, 2005) and more than 4,000 deaths on the Trail of Tears alone (Thornton, 1984). Both the boarding schools and the process of relocation are examples of how “good” intentions that are rooted in colonial belief systems are still subject to devastating effects.

The current policy-era distinction as one of “Self-Determination” is also subject to the impacts of colonial legacy. This era was initiated with the passing of the Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (ISDEAA) (Public Law 93-638, 1975) and signified a shift in how the federal government conceptualized and, therefore, designed policies pertaining to its relationship with Tribes. The passing of this act was a response to persistent advocacy efforts of Indigenous peoples who argued for schooling practices to reflect the worldviews, languages, histories, and cultural traditions of Indigenous nations throughout the country. Within South Dakota specifically, state-level

policies have followed suit and have ranged from the creation of language and cultural standards to funding streams for cultural programming. These state-level policies, however, have comprised temporary policy solutions that respond to the demands of Indigenous peoples, but exist within a broader context of rampant colonially-influenced policymaking that is intended to further an agenda of “American” identity and uphold colonial systems of power and authority. For example, the state has allowed a set of Oceti Sakowin cultural standards to be developed, however when concepts from these standards were incorporated into the state Social Studies standards in 2021, the state department of education revised the standards and removed most positive references to Oceti Sakowin history and culture. After public backlash, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem completely relaunched the standards revision process with a smaller, predominantly Republican team of primarily non-educators (Matzen, 2023). Rather than include Indigenous history in the context of state history, at the request of content-area experts and long-time educators, policymakers and state education officials chose to ignore democratic processes and design the standards themselves to ensure the United States was painted in the “right” light (Groves, 2022).

The South Dakota Social Studies Standards revision process serves yet another example of how colonial legacies continue to proliferate policy decisions beyond any specific era or historical point in time. Furthermore, the process illustrates that policies that fall within the policy era of “Self-Determination” do not necessarily support Indigenous self-determination. As quickly as the standards were built to include Indigenous history and culture of the state through the lens of Indigenous perspectives, they were replaced with something more western and through the lens of policymakers.

The states efforts do nothing to promote sovereignty and community self-determination and, instead, work to actively perpetuate the harm that has been a well-documented byproduct of exclusionary curriculum. This also points to the reality that state mechanisms are unlikely to be vehicles for sovereignty. There is, therefore, a distinct difference between self-determination as a right to determine one's own path or as a practice of Tribal sovereignty and Self-Determination as a set of policies informed by the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. Throughout this document, I will connote these differences by using the capitalized "Self-Determination" to reference state and federal policy-based notions of the term. Namely, this capitalization denotes a specific set of policy-defined requirements set forth by the Indian Self-Determination Education and Assistance Act of 1975 (ISDEAA) including the requirement for "maximum Indian participation in the direction of education as well as other federal services (Public Law 93-638, 1975, p. 2203). I will use the lowercase "self-determination" to refer to the range of interpretations of this concept that are linked to both political and cultural sovereignty as well as the right of a group or individual to define how they will live, speak, engage in spiritual practices, and exercise cultural traditions (Miller, 2002). While the latter is less clearly defined, this is intentional, as there are a wide range of ways Indigenous peoples understand and enact it. While this delineation between self and Self-Determination certainly does not encompass all understandings of the term, it is important to denote between the federal use of the term as it informs policymaking at that level, and localized uses of the term that often inform resistance movements including the push for policy changes.

The distinction between Self-Determination as a policy construct and Indigenous self-determination as a process of enacting self-governance and sovereignty is crucial to understanding the range of policy enactments that take place in the name of Self-Determination within schools. Because the two conceptualizations of the term represent vastly diverging ideologies, they also lead to vastly diverging actions (in most cases). The federally utilized concept of Self-Determination connotes a benevolent paternalism, which acknowledges Tribes' right to self-governance and sets the stage for Tribal consultation within education, however there are no reliable systems of accountability for non-Tribal entities or states to engage in "maximum Indian participation" (Public Law 93-638, 1975, p. 2203). Indigenous self-determination, however, connotes legacies of resistance to federal and state actions in the name of Tribal autonomy, cultural perpetuity, and Indigenous resurgence free from colonial influence (Corntassel, 2012).

### **The History of Indigenous Education is a History of Resistance**

Just as assimilatory practices and policies have shaped much of the history of Indian Education, so have resistance movements. Native American peoples have not simply been passive recipients of policy interventions and directives. These movements have varied throughout time but have been a consistent and persistent response to assimilatory and termination-based policies. In the early 1800s, for example, the Shawnee leader Tecumseh helped to organize a massive resistance movement against westward expansion that involved Tribal nations throughout the Great Lakes area (Brownlie, 2012), advocating against settler-colonialism. Additionally, Moulder (2011) explores the ways in which Cherokee women used English language acquisition to maintain their traditional positions of political power within Cherokee society, even in the midst of the United

States' "civilization" program during the 19th century. Furthermore, In 1883, Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller established the Indian Religious Crimes Codes, which were followed by Thomas Morgan's "Rules for Indian Courts" in 1892 (Morgan, 1892). Both of these policies outlawed Native American spiritual practices, making them punishable by imprisonment and the withholding of government food rations, in direct contradiction to the First Amendment (Irwin, 1997). By 1900, however, many Tribally-based and pan-Indian resistances to these policies had developed including the Four Mothers Society of Natchez-Creek and the Snake Society, dedicated to "preserving the old Creek spiritual way and resisting political encroachment" (Irwin, 1997, p. 41). These acts of resistance alongside many others, however, were not simply reactions to policy. Rather, they built on one another, becoming an interwoven series of practices that united individuals and Tribes in common goals of reclamation and revitalization.

Lomawaima (1995) describes this cycle in the experiences of students at the Chilocco Indian School, identifying that students formed "a complex web of support and mutual respect" (p. 44) in their shared experiences and shared resistance. Throughout the assimilation era (1887-1934), Indigenous peoples continuously exercised their individual and collective agency to maintain traditional spiritual and educational practices, build relationships across multiple lines, and to push back against government efforts to eradicate their cultural, linguistic, and spiritual identities.

This collective series of resistances led to a dramatic shift in federal Indian policy by 1934. The United States government, under Franklin D. Roosevelt, came to recognize that Native nations were not interested, broadly speaking, in adopting settler colonial norms. This, combined with settlers' declining desire to purchase Indian lands as a result

of the Great Depression, the publication of the Meriam Report (which chronicled the dismal conditions on reservations at the time), and increased public criticism of and concern for Indian policies, meant that a change in the federal approach to Indian policy was required (Pevar, 2012). John Collier, Roosevelt's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, stated, "No interference with Indian religious life or expression will hereafter be tolerated. The cultural history of Indians is in all respects to be considered equal to that of any non-Indian group" (Pevar, 2012, p. 10). Policies in this era, namely the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), while criticized for being paternalistic and ethnocentric, tended to provide additional federal funding for Tribal programs in an effort for Tribes to "rehabilitate the Indian's economic life" (Collier in Pevar, 2012, p. 10). While many spiritual practices were still outlawed (and would be until 1978), the IRA did restore some Tribal control over education, land, and governance.

By 1950, federal concern for the cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and legal autonomy of Tribes was once again replaced by an assimilationist perspective and resulting policies followed suit. This era, deemed "Termination," *terminated* the political relationships between the federal government and Tribes, in part due to rising fear of any programming that could be categorized as "socialist." Under Termination policies, funding that had been guaranteed under Roosevelt was rapidly eliminated, states were granted jurisdiction over Tribal land, many reservations were abolished, and all federal services were withdrawn. In a more aggressive effort to assimilate Native peoples, federal funding was channeled into the relocation program of 1952 (Davis, 2013; Pevar, 2012). This program promised job training and housing assistance to Native peoples who volunteered to relocate to urban areas (although it could be argued that this was a false choice, given the

uncertain conditions on reservations due to Termination). The promises of economic opportunity, however, were largely unfulfilled and by 1960, many of those who had migrated to urban areas experienced prejudice and discrimination in the housing, job, health, criminal justice, and social services areas. The opportunities that were promised were generally replaced by disparate conditions and unequal access. Davis (2013) explores what this looked like in Minneapolis, which was a major relocation site for the program. She states:

A 1969 report characterized more than 70 percent of Indian rental housing in Minneapolis as substandard. The report cited nonfunctioning refrigerators in one-third of Indian rental units, no plumbing in 36 percent, and 75 percent with broken doors or stairs or no working lights. Another group of researchers reported in 1971 that “uncollected garbage, mice, cockroaches, exposed wiring, and debris piled in the yards of the old houses plague Indian tenants” in both Minneapolis and St. Paul. (pp. 25-26)

As a result, Native peoples from multiple Tribes began to organize, particularly within Minneapolis, to challenge policies and to support one another, just as they had been doing for centuries in response to assimilatory attempts by the federal government. Homes became meeting spaces, relationships were formed with non-Indian groups, and additional organizations were formed to preserve linguistic and cultural practices. On July 28, 1968, at one community meeting in Minneapolis, around 200 people gathered to voice their concerns about the conditions facing local Native Americans. The meeting resulted in the founding of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Although perspectives on AIM, its intentions, and its methods vary widely, AIM’s activism included

occupations of Alcatraz Island, Wounded Knee, and Mount Rushmore, and pushed to the forefront a national dialogue on Native American self-determination and the endemic racism that stood in the way. As this dialogue continued, activism became increasingly centered on educational self-determination, specifically, with the intention to address the cultural loss, systemic bias, and racism in public schools that had resulted from centuries of assimilation and termination policies (Davis, 2013).

By 1975, the United States Congress could no longer ignore this growing movement and passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, establishing an official stance of promoting, “maximum Indian participation in the direction of education as well as other federal services” (Public Law 93-638, 1975, p. 2204). This act legally shifted the responsibility of governments from exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the policy-making process to one of mandated inclusion—a feeble attempt at promoting Native American self-governance. Within this era of self-determination, which extends to the present day, many state and federal-level policies have been passed, debatably in the name of Indian self-governance and self-determination. Such policies have included: P.L. 95-471, which established funding for Tribally-controlled colleges and universities (Public Law 95-471, 1978), Executive Order 13096, which emphasized improving reading and mathematics scores on standardized tests as well as “reducing the influence of long-standing factors that impede educational performance, such as poverty and substance abuse” (Clinton, 1998, p.42681), the Native American Languages Act (Public Law 101-477, 1990) and most recently, funding for language and cultural programming within the Every Child Succeeds Act (American Institutes for Research, 2016). These policies responded to continued activism that

outlasted AIM's formal organization (Native American Rights Fund, 1998), as well as to a shift in educational literature and research more broadly that began to position the "languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p.87) as assets, rather than "deficiencies to be overcome if they are to learn the dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of being demanded in schools" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 87).

State education policy in South Dakota has, similarly, seen some progress in terms of honoring Indigenous self-determination, however state forces remain committed to colonial ideology. In 2020, a coalition of Indigenous educators proposed public funding for Oceti Sakowin schools, which would be required to partner with local organizations and would focus curriculum on Indigenous language learning, academics, physical and mental health services, and more. The bill, Senate Bill 66 (South Dakota Senate Bill 66, 2020), was supported by all nine Oceti Sakowin tribes in South Dakota. It was passed unanimously in the state senate but did not move beyond the house education committee. It is worth noting that, in the same year, the house education committee failed to pass a bill, House Bill 1143, which would have prohibited "the use of racially derogatory or discriminatory school or athletic team names, mascots, nicknames, logos, imagery, or celebrations depicting Native Americans and Native American culture" (South Dakota House Bill 1143, 2020). A similar school funding bill was proposed in 2021 and 2022. In 2022, the bill passed both the senate education committee and full senate hearings. In the house education committee, however, the bill failed. One representative, Sue Peterson, argued that her "no" vote was based on the idea that she heard "words like equity and decolonization and those types of activist-based terms" in

proponent testimony for the bill (Provide for the Creation and Funding of Oceti Sakowin Community-Based Schools, 2022, 1:52:00). The colonial ideology represented here is what allows a house representative of South Dakota to explicitly state they are against “equity” for Indigenous students, without any consequence or accountability.

The degree to which the state legislature is genuinely concerned with the wellbeing of Indigenous students is questionable, given their voting record and their simultaneous rejection of Indigenous-led movements for educational equity. This reality is eerily similar to the example shared at the beginning of this chapter. While state policymakers may articulate moral values that are based on justice and equity, their actions often work to intentionally (attempt to) limit justice and equity for Indigenous people in the state.

The fact that the state’s staunch opposition to Indigenous leadership and policy is occurring within a policy era of “Tribal Self-Determination,” is ironic in terminology, but falls directly in line with the history of federal Indian policy in the United States. When Tribes assert their treaty rights, they are often met with counter-policies or lengthy legal battles. Under Self-Determination policies, it would be reasonable to assume that Indigenous Nations have the right to influence, if not determine, major factors in the education of Indigenous young people, or at the very least, that “maximum Indian participation” would be honored in the process of policy development. As Brayboy and Lomawaima (2018) state, “Native nations, communities, and citizens must be able to engage in futures of their own making” (p. 92). For policymakers, however, little has changed since the assimilation and termination eras of federal Indian policy.

It is not shocking that policymaking should play out this way, given state and federal histories and their relationships with Indigenous nations. As stated previously, the majority of policymaking for Indian Education has been focused on ensuring that Indigenous peoples assimilate into western (and white) norms and value systems. Szasz (1999) states:

In the fifty years before the publication of the Meriam Report, the federal government pursued a policy of total assimilation of the American Indian into the mainstream society. Recognizing the vast difficulties in achieving this goal, Congress and the Indian Bureau adopted a plan to remold the Indian's conception of life, or what came to be known as his 'system of values.' If this could be changed, assimilationists reasoned, the Indian would then become like the white man. The Indian's system of values was expressed in the education of his children and in his attitude toward the land. Consequently, the assimilationists chose to attack these two concepts as the major targets of their campaign. (p.8)

Education was, historically, a major focus for assimilatory strategy. This is not an uncommon trend throughout history, which illuminates the idea that simply because a policy falls within this era of Self-Determination, or even if state actors follow the requirements set forth for "maximum Indian participation" in the ISDEAA itself, resulting actions frequently work against Indigenous interests. In states with large Native American reservation and urban populations, like South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Alaska, and others, these differing interpretations and conceptualizations of s/Self-determination are present, visible, and

impacting the daily decision making of policymakers, students, teachers, school administrators, and other individuals in both overt and covert ways.

### **Indian Education Now: What the Data Say**

Activism and major efforts by Indigenous groups have led to policy shifts, however policies designed through the lens of colonial history and in the image of the ISDEAA of 1975 have not led to equity for Indigenous students. While the data shared below are frustrating, my intention in sharing them is not to set up this dissertation as an attempt to explain them. Simply put, these data represent the current status of Indian Education under the direction of colonial state and federal forces and policymaking. These are state data that represent state-level policy priorities and their (in)effectiveness. It is important to also note that these data do not represent community-defined priorities or ways that local initiatives (like the privately-run cultural and language schools mentioned earlier in this document) are seeing success across non-western indicators and forms of measurement. Simply put, these data reflect how the state is failing Indigenous students *by its own measurements*. Recency of these data vary due to variations in education reporting in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2021, 30% of American Indian/Alaska Native students attended high-poverty schools (compared to 7% of their white peers) (Irwin et al., 2023). As of 2019, American Indian/Alaska Native students were the lowest performing of any racial group on standardized reading assessments, showing little to no improvement since 1994 (deBrey et al., 2019). Furthermore, life outcomes for Indigenous young people in the United States are even more dire. American Indian/Alaska Native adults have the highest unemployment rates nationally (deBrey et al., 2019, p. vii), and 31% of young adults are

neither in school or working (p. vii). From 1999 to 2017, the suicide rate for Native American men increased 71% and for Native American women, it increased 139% compared to a national increase of 33% (Curtin & Hedegaard, 2017). A 2019 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that, at that time, adolescent American Indian/Alaska Native females had a death rate that was five times higher than their white peers, and that violent deaths, injuries, homicide, and suicide accounted for “75 percent of all mortality in the second decade of life for American Indian/Alaska Natives” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Within South Dakota, specifically, 20% of American Indian and Alaska Native students were proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) in 2023 compared with 57% of their white peers. In the same school year, 12% of Native students were proficient in math compared to 50% of their white peers (South Dakota Department of Education, 2023). According to the 2019 census, 13.1% of residents in the state were living in poverty while Oglala Lakota County (Pine Ridge Sioux Indian Reservation) and Todd County (Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation) saw poverty rates of 54% and 48.4% respectively. Per capita income was over \$29,000 for the state compared with just over \$10,000 for both Oglala Lakota and Todd counties (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Native American youths in South Dakota die by suicide at a rate 2.5 times higher than their white peers (South Dakota Suicide Prevention, 2020). Todd County School District, which served 96.45% Native American students in the 2021-2022 school year, had more teachers with three or fewer years of experience, more teachers who had no certification at all, and more teachers on an alternative certification or permit than the state averages. This was paired with a 9% proficiency rate in ELA and a 0% proficiency rate in math for

the district, relative to 51% and 43% of students in the state for ELA and math respectively (South Dakota Department of Education, 2022).

With such an emphasis on Self-Determination-based policies allegedly aimed at expanding “educational opportunities for Native American students to learn their Native languages, histories, and cultural practices; promote Indigenous learning through the use of traditional ecological knowledge; and enhance access to complete and competitive educations that prepare Native American students for college, careers, and productive and satisfying lives” (Biden, 2021), coupled with intentional funding to improve educational outcomes for these students, the persistence of these statistics is alarming. Self-determination-based education policies explicitly state “maximum Indian participation” in guiding schooling as well as improved outcomes (including linguistic and cultural ones) for Indigenous young people as a clear aim, and yet, schools, policies, and practices that serve Indigenous students throughout the country are continuing to fall short of their promises and stated intentions and, instead, perpetuate colonial legacies. Furthermore, the state’s adamant unwillingness to explore potential pathways that could lead to improved outcomes across state-defined indicators is an example of the blatant and overt colonial ideology that governs the majority of thinking in state policymaking. These shortcomings occur in multiple forms and are not surprising to many Indigenous peoples. For example, Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory scholars position racism and colonization as “not an aberration but rather a fundamental way of organizing society” (Sleeter, 2017, p. 157). This is possibly one explanation for the differences in poverty rates, graduation rates, and academic data points between Native American students and their white peers. Furthermore, one could also extrapolate from

this concept the idea that perhaps schools and academic achievement markers are rooted in and defined by colonial and racist standards to begin with, making them an intentional vehicle for continuing cycles of oppression. After all, as Szasz (1999) stated, education and land policies have been primary targets for assimilation and termination due to their central roles in Indigenous ways of life, historically. Such policies, including the creation of government-funded mission and industrial schools through the “civilization fund” (p. 8), were developed under the premise that, “the Indians must conform to the ‘white man’s ways,’ peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must” (Prucha, 2000, p. 176). Many Critical Race theorists and critical pedagogues would likely argue that this has not changed. Cannella (2014), for example, states, “...all people’s actions and identities are shaped by their sociohistorical context and political positionality. All students of color are marginalized in a racialized society...” (p. 172). The centrality of colonial ideology to education and education policies--including assimilationist and Self-Determination policies alike--means that the data points outlined previously are an explicit product of that ideology.

As Cannella (2014) has stated, sociohistorical context plays a major role in defining the actions and identities of people, including enactments of present-day policies. Historically, government policies consistently served to advance Manifest Destiny—the divine chosenness by a “higher power” of white colonial settlers to expand Westward, requiring the destruction of “profane” and “wicked” Indigenous peoples and their ways of life (Stephanson, 1995, p. 11). Manifest Destiny used an underlying assumption that the settler-colonizer’s role was to subdue the west and overcome “barriers at the advancing margins of civilization” (Mifflin, 2017, p. 65). These

“barriers”—Indigenous peoples who inhabited the land desired by Euro-American settler-colonizers—“posed a problem...for acquiring Western land for farming and ranching, exploiting mineral wealth and other natural resources, promoting the agenda of Protestantism, and establishing railroad-based commercial links to the East” (Mifflin, 2017, p. 65). Manifest Destiny served as the justification for the intentional and explicit assimilation and termination of Indigenous nations throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as explored earlier in the paper. This ideology, rooted in the supremacy of whiteness that Richard Henry Pratt and Andrew Jackson embodied, continues to shape the policies that define and govern the United States. Brayboy (2005), for example, states that “Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation” (p. 429). Assimilation, which is rooted in colonial ideology, continues to be the goal of education, whether explicitly identified or not. This occurs through the paternalistic stance held by the federal government in regards to Indigenous Self-Determination, standardized testing priorities, the labeling of bilingual students as “Limited English Proficient,” devaluation of localized epistemologies, and other realities that are explored throughout this paper. “Settler colonial relations do not end once the “frontier” disappears and Indigenous people have been conquered. In a settler state like the United States...national political and economic forces continue to try to dispossess them” (Davis, 2013, p. 17). Essentially, we can anticipate that coloniality is deeply entrenched in policy enactment and educational decision-making.

### **Significance of the Study**

As emphasized throughout this paper, the fact that assimilatory schooling practices continue to thrive in a policy era of Tribal Self-Determination is not surprising. Many interventions, such as the integration of students' linguistic and cultural traditions into schooling (among others) have been proposed through scholarly pedagogical work, however the impact of this work on systemic policies is relatively unclear. As explored earlier, Lipsky (2010) examines the complexity of the relationship between policy and practice in a study of "street-level bureaucrats" (including judges, teachers, social workers, etc.), which takes into account the very complex ways that inequity is systematically perpetuated by even the most well-intentioned public servants. While the broader field of Critical Policy Studies emphasizes and explores the subjectivities at play in policy enactment and a great deal of Indigenous Education research has examined the role that policies have historically played in assimilation of Indigenous peoples through education, I argue that there is a need to position these two fields in conversation with one another in order to understand the ways that individual educators and education stakeholders negotiate their roles in the policy enactment process within the context of Indigenous education. This study, therefore, holds the possibility to understand how educators and systems leaders hold multiple priorities in tandem and in relationship with one another, how they enact or disrupt hegemonic policy discourses and priorities, and the thin line between ideologies and practices that perpetuate inequity or not.

### **Self-Determination Policy Enactment in the Context of Comparative International Development Education**

Examining the intersection of culture, education, and educational policy as they pertain to culturally and contextually relevant education reform is a cornerstone of

Comparative International Development Education. Particular emphasis on equality in education and on “multiculturalism, race, and ethnicity” constituted 4% and 3.7% respectively of the themes of scholarly work in the field in 2014 (Bray, 2014). Within recent decades, this work has explicitly begun to include approaches to Indigenous education. May and Aikman (2003) outline some of the themes of this work, including the dehumanizing impacts of formal education, the politics of recognition for Indigenous epistemologies within policy, and the need for locally-controlled Indigenous education programs. More recently, in a presidential address at the Comparative International Education Society, Regina Cortina (2019) offered a different perspective. She argues that development discourse is rooted in colonial notions of saviorism and challenges the epistemological Westernness of scholarly work in the field. As the field of Comparative International Development Education continues to grow and evolve, I hope to contribute to the body of work that challenges colonial structures, and to offer a study that supports Tribal s/Self-Determination by examining, complicating, and exposing those colonial structures and processes that currently maintain a large proportion of political and educational decision-making power and by uplifting stories of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) and refusal (Honig, 2021) in response to colonial federal and state powers and policies.

I believe this research has implications for both teacher preparation/development and policy development as well. As the United States continues to become more divided over educational issues like Critical Race Theory, educational equity, the rights of transgender students, and more, teachers and school administrators will be required to navigate increasingly restrictive educational policies. They will also, therefore, be

confronted with making decisions that either comply with or resist such policies. Developing a complex understanding of this process for educators and education stakeholders can provide insight into how these decisions are made and, therefore, the ways in which teacher preparation programs can better equip educators to understand their roles in the policy enactment process. Furthermore, education stakeholders who serve students on the Rosebud Sioux Indian reservation represent a diverse body of individuals, each with unique perspectives that are informed by their own positionality and goals for Indigenous self-determination. The multiple theories of how to best approach the challenge of education inequity for Indigenous students as well as theories about what equity can and should look like for our students comprise a complex set of policy-connected discourses and goals. My hope is that this study offers an opportunity to clarify the shared beliefs and tenets regarding education for Indigenous self-determination that are locally defined and contextualized. Additionally, I am aiming to identify opportunities for disruption to dominant hegemonic practices that perpetuate assimilation and inequity. Finally, I am hopeful that this study offers a humanizing approach to understanding individuals and their policy-aligned actions in a way that simultaneously a.) makes the opportunities for resistance to colonial policy initiatives clear, b.) promotes a sense of accountability amongst education stakeholders toward Indigenous self-determination and c.) illuminates opportunities for critical self-reflection amongst stakeholders in service of this accountability.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study has several limitations that have impacted the work in different ways. First, my proximity to the site of study has changed drastically in the past two years.

While I remain connected to individuals within the Reservation community and maintain both professional and personal relationships with many individuals there, I also am removed from the context in a way that makes me less aware of the daily activities and conversations that are happening in the context of education. That being said, I have made every effort to remain actively engaged and involved in such conversations, however I recognize that this has limited the study in some ways. Secondly, this study is limited by the impact of Covid-19 on safety precautions, protocols, and even education data reporting. State education data were not reported during the height of the pandemic in order to accommodate the swiftly changing priorities of educators and school districts, which has made finding the most recent accurate data more challenging than in pre-pandemic years. The Covid-19 virus also caused a potential risk in hosting in-person interviews and, as such, the majority of my interviews were conducted virtually. While this is not inherently a bad thing, it does change the dynamic of the conversation and renders some information (body language, etc) unable to be included in the interview process. Another significant limitation of this study is my own positionality and relationships with the research participants. While the visiting/interviewing process was intended to be a relational practice and, therefore, conversational, I also recognize that my reactions to certain points in conversations or my own political leanings could have influenced participant responses in the process.

This study is bounded by several delimiting parameters. First and foremost, I chose to work within the context of one Reservation community in South Dakota. As each Tribal Nation is a sovereign entity with its own distinct cultural practices and political priorities, it is important to note that themes could vary across Nations.

Secondly, the visiting, presencing, and contextualizing processes (which are explored more in-depth in Chapter Three) all took place at a time when one particular policy impacting Indigenous Education was at the forefront of public discourse. This policy, the South Dakota Social Studies Standards and the process of its revision, was a highly controversial topic. While I chose to engage individuals in dialogue regarding this particular policy and its implications, that does not mean that other policies in the current Indigenous Education climate of South Dakota are not equally as relevant or important. Lastly, I had initially intended to post a survey to identify potential research participants in the event that individual outreach was insufficient for identifying a statistically adequate number of individuals to participate. In actuality, my personal and professional networks allowed for ample interviews. Because I chose to work with individuals within my own network, there are similarities, overall, in general political leanings and governmental critiques. I do not believe that this makes the data irrelevant, however it does limit the scope of perspectives that are represented in the study.

Finally, this study rests on several key assumptions that have not been interrogated in the literature. Namely, the assumption that self-determination is a desirable outcome of challenging dominant hegemonic structures. While the research does support the idea that current educational practices are insufficient for, or even harmful to, Indigenous students, there are a number of interpretations of ideal alternatives. I believe the concept of Indigenous self-determination encompasses these, as it leaves room for a range of perspectives and definitions. This does not mean, however, that there are not opposing viewpoints from within the Indigenous Education field.

Chapter Three of this dissertation will explore the methodological limitations and delimitations of this study as well as my own positionality and the mechanisms by which I attempted to address positionality-related concerns.

### **Conclusion and Summary of Remaining Chapters**

In summary, this dissertation is intended to develop a robust understanding of the policy enactments of education stakeholders in the context of colonial policymaking in South Dakota. Specifically, I will examine the ways in which Tribal Self-Determination policies and enactments are intertwined with Tribal serving schools and Tribal and non-Tribal education stakeholders and what this illuminates about educational development for Indigenous students in the state. This study is complicated by the differing interpretations and intentions of notions of Self-Determination from the lens of federal Indian Policy and Indigenous self-determination as a practice of exercising sovereignty and self-governance.

Chapter Two will provide an overview of literature that more concretely outlines the fundamental epistemic tensions between Indigenous education and the current and historical policy contexts. These tensions anchor education stakeholders' responses to and interpretations of policies and impact their understanding of their own roles in enacting and negotiating them. Chapter Three will provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology, which is rooted in an adapted approach to critical ethnography. I will clarify more thoroughly the limitations and delimitations of the study, my positionality, data analysis procedures, and the key factors that influenced the study design in order to ethically engage in research in an Indigenous community as a non-Indigenous woman. Chapter Four elaborates on the data collection and analysis process

and shares the findings from data analysis regarding the current state of Indigenous Education in South Dakota. I will introduce the themes and patterns from the data and share information about the process of data triangulation. In Chapter Five, I will explore the practices of decoloniality in which participants engaged, including epistemic delinking and refusals, and how they inform Indigenous Education. Finally, Chapter Six will provide a summary of the study and a response to the research questions, as well as implications for action, reflections, and recommendations based on the research findings.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### Introduction

As argued in Chapter One, despite ongoing policy attempts at improving outcomes, which are commonly defined through a lens of standardized goals but sometimes include language and cultural standards as well, colonial ideologies rooted in assimilation and termination of Indigenous peoples continue to saturate the education policy world in South Dakota. Not only is Self-Determination, whether defined through a colonized or decolonial lens, a continued site of struggle in schools, but both academic and broader life outcomes are alarming. I have discussed, in Chapter One, some of the potential reasons for this, namely: that ideological differences create tensions for policy actors, and the ideologies that govern schooling policies and practices are often rooted in settler colonialism. The idea that ideological differences are contested ground, however, is not new. Nor is the idea that schools are intended to maintain a settler state rooted in assimilation (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Scholars have attempted to remedy this challenge, often either through the lens of policy or practice, offering compelling arguments for how educators and policy makers alike should think, teach, and act. And yet, schools often remain colonizing and oppressive spaces.

In Chapter One, I outlined some of the history of federal Indian policy, with some specific emphasis on how this has played out in education at both the national and state levels. The chapter focused largely on how colonial ideologies have persisted through coloniality and how individuals and groups have worked to resist these forces over time. Ultimately, the reality that Tribal and non-Tribal education stakeholders must consistently navigate their roles in the context of colonial policy and decolonial calls for

action is a major factor in the educational experience of Indigenous students. Policies that exist in this era of Tribal Self-Determination often make it more difficult (or at least, not easier) for education to be rooted in Indigenous visions of self-determination, self-governance, and sovereignty. In many cases, these policies state explicit aims of supporting Indigenous education, however their rootedness in coloniality limits what is possible in achieving this aim and limits the very definition of Indigenous education itself. Needless to say, this creates epistemic tensions that define the daily actions of individuals working within Tribal education spaces.

This review of literature will build on this work in two ways. First, I will more thoroughly explore these tensions through a policy and history-based analysis, aimed at explicitly naming what the tensions are and illuminating evidence as to how they have manifested, specifically within the context of my site of research: the state of South Dakota and schools that serve Indigenous students in the state. Second, I will explore how scholars, Elders, knowledge holders, and others have attempted to address these tensions in the past. Overall, this review of literature seeks to answer the following questions related to my research:

1. What are the policy tensions that characterize education and schooling in Indigenous South Dakota?
2. How do scholars, Elders, knowledge holders and others define the relationship between these “tensions” in transforming schooling?

Ultimately, answering these questions will clarify the daily decisions that education stakeholders are required to make and the role that the state plays in limiting possibilities

for Indigenous self-determination. It will also, however, clarify the opportunities for resistance that exist in the same space.

Thus, in what follows, I will offer a thematic overview of what I believe these complex issues/tensions to be, supported with further policy-level evidence. These tensions are phrased in terms of what I understand to be the historically informed and enacted perspective that is present in federal Indian education policies, which is through the lens of explicit assimilation. This is not intended to situate “American identity” as the “norm,” by positioning Indigenous perspectives as a “threat” to it. This decision on framing is intended, however, to situate a pervasive understanding of “American identity” alongside the policies that have been created and enacted in service of it, as a problem that this research attempts to understand. The way I frame the tensions below is intended to problematize the *perceptions, worldviews, and epistemological grounds* that have informed Indian education policy for centuries, and explore how these epistemologies have transcended time, political shifts, and changing views on education. The framing is also intended to articulate the sites of resistance that many educators and education stakeholders engage with in their policy enactments. These perceptions operate as an undercurrent that sometimes dramatically influences policymaking and sometimes only slightly informs it, but is perpetually present. In the final pages of this chapter, I will also provide a review of literature that summarizes how scholars, Elders, knowledge holders and others have attempted to address the outlined tensions within the field of Indigenous education.

**Part 1: What are the policy tensions that characterize education and schooling in Indigenous South Dakota?**

***Tension 1: Indigenous identity is seen as a threat to American identity***

In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull “Inter Caetera,” which provided Spain and Portugal the explicit permission (from god, via the church) to colonize the land and peoples of the Americas. I begin my exploration here not to insinuate that Indigenous history began with “discovery,” but because this document, which came to be known as the Doctrine of Discovery, served as one of the first one-sided legal principles that situated the present-day United States within the context of perceived European and Christian superiority (Miller, 2011). The official bull stated that any land not presently inhabited by Christian people could be claimed by colonizers, despite the fact that Indigenous peoples did not adhere to the same principles. Certainly these ideas were not new at the time. Even Bartolome de las Casas, who famously spoke out against the inhumane treatment of Native Americans in the 1500s, did so through two distinct lenses: 1.) that Indigenous peoples were “altogether incapable of hard labour” (de las Casas, 1552), and 2.) that Indigenous slaves should, therefore, be replaced by slaves from Africa (Kendi, 2017). Racist ideas of Euro-Christian superiority did not begin when misdirected explorers landed in what became known as the Americas. Rather, these ideas had been formed for centuries, cultivated in biblical texts that encouraged both segregation and racial hierarchy (Kendi, 2017). Many scholars also argue that ideas of racial hierarchy were perpetuated in order to sustain colonization as well as to maintain a white ruling class. Laura Stoler states, “Internal divisions augmented the intensity of racist practice, affected the terrains of contest, and shaped social policies regarding those ruled. Racist rationales permeated the responses of *both* the corporate elite and their less privileged European class opposition” (Stoler, 2010, p. 23). She continues to identify that different

colonial agendas rooted in class and gender shaped racial politics. Furthermore, Mignolo (2002), Quijano and Ennis (2000), Cusicanqui (2012), and others who have written about coloniality argue that colonization formed structures of control and power that perpetuate to this day. Essentially, the ideology of colonization and the ideas of racial supremacy and inferiority needed to defend it were deeply rooted in the motivations, policies, and behaviors of the United States since its inception and, in the same way that racist beliefs informed policies at that time, they continue to do so today.

Over time, the Doctrine became enforced by the United States, specifically against Native nations, as American Manifest Destiny (Miller, 2011, p. 331). George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and other political leaders frequently used Manifest Destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery to claim “political dominance over the Indian nations” (Miller, 2011, p. 331). David Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima (2002) identify three legal interpretations of this doctrine that have informed policymaking over time. First, the expansive definition (most frequently utilized in Manifest Destiny), which asserts that Indigenous peoples and nations have rights to land, but are “incompetent to manage those lands and require a benevolent guardian who holds full legal title” (p. 21). This “benevolent paternalism” is reminiscent of de las Casas’ account cited above and shows up in later policies, like the Relocation Act discussed in Chapter One. The second definition, absolute, is synonymous with concepts of conquest. Unlike the expansive definition, absolute discovery denies that Indigenous nations have any claim to land at all. Finally, the preemptive definition of the doctrine, which is considered the “most authentic understanding of the term” (Wilkins & Lomawaima,

2002, p. 21), relies on right to first purchase, and places certain limitations on potential settler claims to Indigenous land.

From these doctrines--of discovery and of Manifest Destiny--and their continued use in policymaking even to the present day, it becomes clear that American political identity is inseparable from Christianity, land ownership, and white supremacy. In fact, on March 18, 2019, South Dakota governor Kristi Noem signed into law a partisan bill (Senate Bill 55) that requires all public schools in the state to display the national motto, "In God We Trust." As per the bill, "The display shall be located in a prominent location within each public school. The display may take the form of a mounted plaque, student artwork, or any other appropriate form as determined by the school principal. The display shall be easily readable and may be no smaller than twelve inches wide by twelve inches high" (South Dakota Senate Bill 55, 2019). The state government feels so strongly about this requirement that, in the text of the bill, they also promise legal representation for any school that faces a lawsuit as a result of the display. The bill states:

For any lawsuit brought or any complaint filed against a school district, an employee of a school district, the board of a school district, or a member thereof as a result of a school district displaying the national motto of the United States in accordance with section 1 of this Act, the attorney general shall provide legal representation at no cost to the school district, employee, school board, or member of the school board. (South Dakota Senate Bill 55, 2019)

In the current political climate of South Dakota, any active stance against this is seen as anti-patriotic. Not only do Kristi Noem and the state legislature promise to defend, with public funds, any argument against the bill, but even more recently, Kristi Noem has

increased fervor around silencing dissent. For example, after she enthusiastically signed Senate Bill 55, and promised state-supplied legal defense if this bill were challenged, she also wrote a column in a right-wing publication on January 8, 2021 wherein she stated, “...the left’s indoctrination takes place every day with kids all across America from the time they walk into a school at age 5 to the time they graduate college at 22” (Noem, 2021). More recently, Noem drafted a letter to the head of the South Dakota Board of Regents, naming that she is “concerned about a growing movement throughout the country to reject patriotic education and downplay the positive revolution in human affairs set in motion by our Founders...” and asked the board of regents to consider, among other things, the following:

Whether appropriated funds are being used in a manner that neither the legislative nor executive branch would support. This could include the advancement or promotion of “action civics,” the 1619 project, Critical Race Theory, or any similar theory that misleads students into believing the country is evil, or was founded upon evil, or requiring, compelling, or otherwise directing students to personally affirm, adopt, or adhere to any such beliefs or tenets. (Noem, May 24, 2021)

The implication here is reminiscent of Manifest Destiny ideology, specifically in the positioning of Christianity and whiteness as “right,” “moral,” and the business of the State, while positioning competing ideologies as indoctrination, immoral, dangerous, and needing to be defeated.

The thread of Christianity as an American ideal has been prevalent in policy for centuries. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner famously summed up another crucial

ideological foundation for the United States' political identity: individualism. He argued that Native Americans and Mexicans were barriers to both acquiring land and mineral wealth and to the spread of Christianity, but that settlers were able to overcome these "barriers," through hard work, superior political institutions, and continual expansion (Mifflin, 2017; Turner, 1893). Turner's 1893 speech outlined additional aspects that had come to (and continue to) influence discourse on Americanness and policy alike. A focus on acquiring wealth in various forms, individual liberties, and perpetual expansion were all common ideals in the late 1800s. In South Dakota, these trends continue. In the wake of the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016-2017, Governor Kristi Noem proposed, and passed, a bill called the "Riot Boosting Act" with claims that it was intended to "protect people and property," (Associated Press, 2020a). Later that same year, the Governor claimed individual liberty as the anchor for refusing to issue a mask mandate even amidst the state's identification as a Coronavirus hotspot (Groves, 2020). Despite glaring contradictions regarding when people and property need protection versus when they don't, Noem was heralded in right-leaning spaces across the country as a hero and defender of individual freedoms. Conceptions of American identity remain rooted in Christianity, white supremacy, individualism, land and mineral wealth (via capitalism), and expansion today. At times, these ideals seem to be in contention with one another, however any one of these can be called upon in defense of anti-Indigenous policymaking. As another example, in 1819, the United States congress passed the Civilization Act, which provided explicit funding for religious groups and missionaries to provide education, particularly for the purpose of "civilizing," Native children (U.S. Statutes at Large, 3:516-17, 1819). The very identities of this country's

Indigenous peoples were seen as something that needed policy intervention to “fix,” for multiple reasons ranging from a saviorist paternalism to paving the way for further expansion and land acquisition.

In 1868, many bands of the Oceti Sakowin Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota (although not all) signed the Ft. Laramie treaty with representatives of the United States government. This treaty will be explored more in depth later in this chapter, however, it had particular implications for Native education in South Dakota. Specifically, Article 7 of this treaty states:

In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted, especially of such of them as are or may be settled on said agricultural reservations, and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school; and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with; and the United States agrees that for every thirty children between said ages who can be induced or compelled to attend school, a house shall be provided and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education shall be furnished, who will reside among said Indians, and faithfully discharge his or her duties as a teacher. The provisions of this article to continue for not less than twenty years. (Ft. Laramie Treaty, 1868)

The treaty continues in additional articles to identify men as head of households, to require “cultivating the soil for a living” (Article 8), and to make provisions for the United States government to supply specific clothing (in the form of suits and skirts) for

all Indigenous peoples who settled on the treaty-established Reservation boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation. In return, the treaty required that the Indigenous peoples residing within the reservation boundaries could not oppose railroad construction through the plains, could not “capture, or carry off from the settlements, white women or children” (Article 11), and could not oppose military posts constructed in the area. The policy-based attempt to stifle Indigenous opposition to the American project of progress via colonization and exploitation of land is as present in the “Riot Boosting Act” and other responses to the NoDAPL movement in the context of oil pipeline construction as it is in the Ft. Laramie treaty in the context of railroad construction. Given that “The Indian’s system of values was expressed in the education of his children and in his attitude toward the land,” (Szasz, 1999, p. 8), these policies can be seen as explicit attempts to both undermine sovereignty and jurisdictional rights as much as to control key aspects of Indigenous identity, whether for economic, political, or religious purposes.

The Ft. Laramie Treaty was swiftly broken by the government upon the discovery of gold within the protected lands, and by 1871, the Indian Appropriations Act effectively renounced tribal sovereignty from the perspective of United States policy, banning the further creation of treaties with Indian nations. By 1879, the Carlisle Indian Industrial school was opened by William Henry Pratt, as described in chapter one, and by 1883, the Courts of Indian Offenses was established with the explicit intent to prohibit Native American spiritual practices under threat of imprisonment. Of course, as previously discussed, there were persistent resistances to these policies and Indigenous peoples continued to practice their spiritual beliefs and linguistic traditions. A curious tension exists, however, in these policies. Upon the passing of the Indian Appropriations Act in

1871, Native American peoples were considered wards of the federal government rather than sovereign nations. Indigenous sovereignty had previously been recognized in the United States Constitution and the relationship with tribes was considered to be government to government (Riley, 2017). The shift of the government to consider Indigenous peoples as wards of the state might imply protection under the First Amendment of the constitution in regards to religious practices and freedom to assemble, however Native American peoples were not considered to be citizens of the United States at that time. At once, they were denied sovereign status from the lens of the United States government and denied citizen status as well. Alongside the fact that the United States constitution recognizes Tribes as sovereign governments (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013), this serves as further evidence that the United States has a history of breaking its own policies in service of, specifically, the attempt to control the identities of Native American peoples. When this fails, they simply create new policies and regulations.

Ideologies of racial and spiritual hierarchies have informed policies for centuries, specifically as they pertain to Indigenous peoples in the United States. Just as these ideas were formed in the centuries prior to “discovery,” and influenced policymaking in the early days of the United States, so do they continue to evolve and play out in policymaking today. Certainly, federal policies do not always explicitly name a goal of assimilation or even termination as they once did, however this legacy can be felt in the continuance of policy enactments that are rooted in notions of Christian and white superiority. Goals of assimilation today are less explicitly worded than they once were, however policies aimed at creating funding and other opportunities for the reclamation

and resurgence of Indigenous cultures in school settings continue to be met with opposition by policymakers. One example is the state and public discourse response to the ESSA act of the Obama administration, which gave way for a legal shift in South Dakota that also included a \$590,000 grant. The grant was “intended for closing the achievement gap” through increasing mental health training and classroom instruction rooted in Lakota culture (Raposa, 2018). This sits in tension with the refusal of the South Dakota government to mandate Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings as curricular standards as well as in the failure of the South Dakota legislature to pass a separate law in 2021, Senate Bill 68, which would have created a funding stream for no more than four Native American community schools. This connects to what Lomawaima and McCarty term the “safety zone”--the “narrow zone of tolerable cultural difference” (2006, p.5) that is allowed in schools. The grant, for example, was managed by a largely white administration who had final approval of what cultural activities were allowable on school grounds. Grant activities took place within a public school district that was required to adhere to specific state policies, and served the purpose of “closing the achievement gap.” The possibility of a school defined and operated by Lakota peoples, however, would leave little room for government oversight--for *white* oversight--of Indigenous schooling. Lakota schools might also challenge the concept of an “achievement gap” altogether, given the fact that the concept itself relies heavily on comparisons of students, standardized assessments, and state-mandated norms (Carey, 2014). While I have little insight into the legal proceedings that took place to deny the passing of Senate Bill 68, the historical and policy evidence suggests that policy actors tend(ed) to view Indigenous identity as something that needs to be mediated, controlled,

and “saved.” This requires the continued paternalism of the state and federal governments and, as seen in the example of Senate Bill 68, the enforcing of state power to ensure that Lakota Language, History, and Culture are only part of the public schooling system to the extent that they deem allowable.

***Tension 2: Indigenous land relationships are seen as a threat to American identity***

Perhaps one of the most famous land disputes in United States history is that of the Black Hills land claim. In the Ft. Laramie Treaty of 1868, all of the land in South Dakota west of the Missouri River was guaranteed to the nations of the Ojibwe, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Sioux (Ft. Laramie Treaty, 1868). Tensions began to rise when George Armstrong Custer was sent to map the lands within the treaty-defined reservation boundaries in order to build a military post. Upon the discovery of gold in the Black Hills (the western part of the reservation boundaries), the United States attempted to negotiate a purchase of the territory, which was declined by the Tribes. In 1877, Congress passed an act that implemented the “agreement” anyway, thus essentially nullifying the Ft. Laramie Treaty (Forty-Fourth Congress, Session 2, Ch 72, 1877). Up until that time, the land had been used by several tribal nations for hunting purposes and became reappropriated to settlers for mining. One of the biggest tensions between Indigenous nations and the United States government has always been, and continues to be, their respective relationships with land. The notion of Manifest Destiny, specifically, requires expansion, industrialization, and mineral exploitation for the purpose of wealth. While Tribal nations often warred with one another in competition for land and natural resources or for other purposes, these disputes did “not usually entail large-scale campaigns of genocidal warfare against enemy groups” (Blick, 1988, p. 654), as was the case with the United States’ relationship

with tribal nations. In 1867, General Ulysses S. Grant received a note from William Tecumseh Sherman that read, “we are not going to let thieving, ragged Indians check and stop the progress,” following a note from the previous year stating, “we must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women, and children,” (King, 2012). Sherman was appointed Commanding General of the Army in 1869 when Grant was elected president. Sherman’s tactics often involved destruction of food, shelter, and livestock, and these tactics were only made stronger by the expansion of railroads through Dakota territory. From the mid-nineteenth century to the end of it, the buffalo population went from approximately 45-million to 300. While there are complex reasons for this, anti-Indigenous sentiment at the governmental level gave way to exploitation of buffalo, hunting for sport, and “hunting by rail” (where settlers would shoot buffalo from the roof of a rail car, leaving the carcass where it lay, and continuing on their way) (King, 2012) as part of a scorched earth approach to westward expansion.

The difference between colonial exploitative relationships with land and the more holistic, relational views of land in Lakota tradition continues to be seen in policy and the enactment of authority today. I should clarify here that each president of the United States has brought with him into office a particular stance on Indian Affairs. Given that, there have been shifts in the tone of policies, however public discourse around these policies remains rooted in conceptualizations of American identity that are steeped in the rhetoric of progress, liberty, and economic supremacy. For example, even President Joe Biden’s revocation of the Keystone XL Pipeline permit has been seen as, according to the South Dakota governor, “the wrong policy on energy, the wrong policy on the environment, and it’s the wrong policy on safety” (Noem in Zoints, 2021) and South

Dakota senator John Thune expressed disappointment that Biden yielded to the “far-left” and “extreme environmental” democratic party. Furthermore, Thune stated: “Canceling this project ignores the reality of our nation’s energy demands and denies a timely conversation about infrastructure modernization” (Thune in Zoints, 2021). Meanwhile, Harold Frazier, chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe at that time, acknowledged the cancellation as a promise kept to the tribal nations of South Dakota.

Of particular concern for the Keystone XL pipeline project through Indigenous communities was the likely influx of mostly male workers, their proximity to reservations, and the historical increases in violent crime towards reservation communities that have accompanied this same situation in other regions (Stern, 2021). Governor Noem’s statement that overturning the pipeline is “the wrong policy on safety,” in relationship with the known negative impact that pipeline construction has had on, particularly, Indigenous women and girls, is a statement that illuminates the continued willingness of white government to attempt to sacrifice Indigenous peoples for the sake of modernity. Certainly, Indigenous peoples have resisted now just as they did in the nineteenth century, however the fact that the government continues to explicitly try to oppress (at best) Indigenous peoples in service of a “better America,” is deeply problematic. Additionally, the fact that Indigenous peoples’ relationships with and claims to land are often seen as a barrier to progress, provides the United States with the rationale it needs to continually attempt to control those relationships. Often, this rhetoric of American identity is directly connected to control of land, extractive practices, and predatory economic policies (Dobson, 2013; Weiss, 2020).

The linkage between land-based policies and schooling may not be clear to most, however the two are inextricable. Along with land policies come notions of borders, boundaries, ownership, exclusion, belonging, and more. In 1830, with the passage of the Indian Removal Act, thousands of Indigenous peoples were forced to relocate to unfamiliar lands west of the Mississippi River. As discussed in Chapter One, this resulted in devastating losses for the peoples who were removed from their homelands. When the Ft. Laramie treaty was signed in 1868, it created clear borders for what was considered “Indian” land and what belonged to the United States. This was not a concept that had existed in the same way in Lakota culture, and from the perspective of the United States, it not only identified where Indigenous peoples “belonged,” but where they were able to travel, where they were able to hunt, and where they weren’t. Christine Rogers Stanton (2019) explores the connection between geographical borders and education policies in reservation towns and towns that border reservations. She argues, “US policy makers have long used physical and cultural boundaries to exclude peoples of color, promote assimilation, and protect settler-colonial constructions of property and progress (p. 223). In her 2019 study, Stanton found that school districts in towns that border Native American reservation communities had a consistent tendency to employ hegemonic strategies in their admissions policies for students, with the intention of maintaining what she refers to as “Educational Manifest Destiny” (p. 201). These tendencies included: assumptions of Indigenous students as criminals or underperformers, exclusion of non-parental guardians, and the general expectation that students will assimilate once admitted to the schools. This was contrasted with reservation-based schools as well as schools that were geographically distant from reservations, which both tended to have

more inclusive practices. This is not markedly different from the experience of students in South Dakota. In early 2015, a group of students from the American Horse School on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota attended a hockey game in nearby Rapid City. During the game, they allegedly were the victims of racial slurs and some witnesses recount beer being spilled on the students as well as being told to “go back to the Rez” (Cook, 2015). In the time that I have lived in South Dakota, I have heard countless similar stories from students about visits to nearby bordertowns that include anything from verbal insults to physical aggression at the hands of white people. Physical boundaries and borders that separate reservations from neighboring towns often serve as markers of racial difference, but also of ideological difference and tension. This tension is brought on by racist policies and practices, which are often, in the context of schooling and otherwise, aimed at young people. This happens through specific school-based policies, but also through the notions of belonging and Americanness described here. Often these policies and practices have the explicit goal of assimilation, however they also make clear for Indigenous students that they “don’t belong” in certain spaces regardless of whether or not they assimilate into colonized notions of schooling.

The concept of self-determination is sometimes intertwined with conversations around land, sovereignty and, by extension, schooling for Indigenous youth. McCarty and Lee (2014) state: “Regardless of whether schools operate on or off tribal lands, in the same way that schools are accountable to state and federal governments, so too are they accountable to the Native American nations whose children they serve,” (p. 102). This truth was further supported by the Obama administration’s “Every Student Succeeds Act.” Section 8538 of the act requires educational programs, including schools, to engage

in meaningful consultation with Tribes in order to receive funding for specific programs. This provision is intended to ensure that tribes have the opportunity to provide input and feedback on particular programming within districts if that district: 1.) has an enrollment of 50 percent or more American Indian/Alaskan Native students or 2.) received a particular grant under Title VII and is located in an area that includes a Tribal nation (South Dakota Department of Education, 2020). While the responsibility of meaningful consultation lies largely with school districts, there is little guidance within the policy for the ongoing tensions between the state government and tribes within South Dakota. Several historical and contemporary policies have created the conditions that now make “meaningful consultation” necessary. Policies and treaties, like the Ft. Laramie Treaty, the Nonintercourse Act of 1790, the Indian Commerce Clause of the Constitution, and others were developed with the intention to allow the United States government to effectively reduce land bases belonging to Indigenous peoples (Ablavsky, 2015). These policies have also served to establish federal plenary power in relationship with Tribes, which has further complicated issues related to land jurisdiction, among others. On the Rosebud Reservation today, this plays out in a seemingly unclear relationship between the Tribal Education department, the public school on the Reservation, and the state department of education. There is some evidence to suggest that this tension has created (or perhaps was created from) a sense of mistrust, exclusion, and lack of regard for Tribal priorities within the public school system. Furthermore, the overlap between the previously discussed tension (“Native American identity is seen as a threat to American identity”) and the land/education relationship cannot be overstated. Policies like the 1887 Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act, ensured that each “head of household”

would receive an allotment of Tribal lands. The federal government held these lands in trust for twenty-five years and would provide a title to the head of household at that time. While there are many complications to this act that have resulted in jurisdictional challenges and others today, the Dawes Act essentially did two things (in regards to this dissertation). First, it reduced Tribal lands by nearly 90-million acres. Secondly, it helped solidify the conditions for non-Native individuals to homestead on tribal lands. One explicit goal of the act was to, “create divisions among Native Americans and eliminate the social cohesion of tribes” (National Park Service, 2021). With an influx of white settlers into Native lands, the American project of assimilation became even more explicit by disrupting traditional land usage by Indigenous peoples, attempting to force colonial gender roles and norms, and eventually the dissolution of Tribal governments (National Park Service, 2021). Communal life was forcibly shifted to individual property ownership and privatization, and relational ecological practices were held hostage by the threat of further land loss if individuals did not use the land for farming exclusively. In South Dakota today, the effects of this loss of land, jurisdictional confusion, and land checkerboarding have led to a complex relationship where the South Dakota state government holds the financial resources to fund local schooling initiatives in Tribal communities. Several proposals for these types of initiatives have taken place in recent years including the Community Education Law in 2017 (which was repealed) or the proposed Senate Bill 68 in 2021 to create and fund a community-based school, which failed to pass through the South Dakota legislature. It is important to note here that two of the schools opened anyway and are funded largely through private grants. The state of South Dakota, however, will not provide funding for such schools, despite their location

on public lands within the boundaries of the Reservation. Similarly, the state discontinued a grant program that was discussed earlier in this chapter, which was implemented within public schools within Reservation boundaries. These schools are often held to state standardized-testing requirements and state curricular requirements. When funding is involved, specifically funding for Indigenous language, culture, and history, the state takes a more hands-off approach. From a policy perspective, whoever governs the land governs education within those lands and within the context of Tribal sovereignty, federal plenary authority, and jurisdictional complexity, this particular piece of the Indian education policy puzzle leaves a great deal of opportunity for the state policymakers to exploit these tensions in service of their own attempts to assimilate Indigenous students specifically through control of education. For example, recently, Governor Noem of South Dakota has proposed \$900,000 in funding for the redesign of civics education in the state, specifically in order to teach South Dakota students “why the U.S. is the most special nation in the history of the world,” (Matzen, 2021). As explored in Chapter One, she also repealed a set of Social Studies standards that had been designed by a multicultural group of K-12 educators from across the state. There is compelling evidence that this action was in response to the incorporation of Oceti Sakowin knowledge and values into the curriculum and in response to the depictions of the United States in the standards as anything other than “the most special” (Groves, 2022). In the end, however, the geographic location and borders of Tribal land and public lands within those boundaries creates the necessary conditions for schools that serve Indigenous students and that are located within Tribal boundaries to be required to follow state laws and policies regarding education.

### ***Tension 3: Indigenous power is seen as a threat to American identity***

The power of Indigenous peoples--as individuals and as nations--has long been seen as a threat to the American national identity, particularly when displays of that power are seen as a threat to progress, Christianity, land ownership, and more. As discussed in Chapter One, resistances by Indigenous peoples to many of the policies mentioned up until this point in Chapter Two ultimately led to a massive shift in the tone of federal Indian policies under Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (IRA) responded to the steady resistance of Indigenous peoples as well as to the Meriam Report, which was a government study that documented the living conditions on reservations. The IRA did several things including but not limited to: ended the allotment of Tribal land and prohibited further lands from being taken away from reservations without Tribal consent, asked Tribes to develop constitutions that would then be ratified by the Secretary of the Interior, and established Native preference for jobs within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2021). The stated intentions of the policy, to promote Tribal self-government and to reduce Indigenous land loss, were, in some ways needed to remedy the abuse of power that the federal government had been guilty of for quite some time. The policy, however, was also an extension of the benevolent paternalistic perspective often weaponized by well-intentioned missionaries throughout the 19th century. In requiring Tribes to maintain certain forms of government and government documents, the IRA also exercised plenary power in a new way that was rejected by some Tribal nations who saw this as a bureaucratic impediment to self-rule (Philp, 1983). At the same time, however, the act also restored some recognition of Tribal governments that had been lost during the assimilation era. The policy was largely

viewed as ineffective within Washington D.C. in that it “did not meet the needs of a diverse Indian population. Nor did it provide substantial economic progress, or create a durable political framework for the future” (Philp, 1983, p. 166).

The Reorganization era was short-lived and replaced in 1953 with a federal policy stance of “termination.” The policies within this era sought to dissolve the federal relationships with Tribes, abolish the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and in some cases to extend state jurisdiction into Tribal lands. Termination policies were one example of “the United States acting to destroy, or at the very least destabilize, Tribal Nations” (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2002, p. 270). For the purposes of this chapter, power here is largely defined through the lens of self-rule and tribal sovereignty. In the decades leading up to the Termination era, American identity was rooted in anticommunism as the Cold War grew closer. The concepts that had become part of American identity after World War II, namely, “anticommunism, individualism, emancipation, and liberation” (Rosier, 2006, p. 1309) were also used to condemn the federal government’s funding of Reservation programs. Nevada senator George Malone argued, for example, that the United States was “spending billions of dollars fighting Communism while it was perpetuating the systems of Indian reservations and Tribal governments, which are natural Socialist environments” (Rosier, 2006, p. 1309). This was a time where the language of Americanization was weaponized against Indigenous peoples to imply “foreignness” and, therefore, anti-Americanness, despite the fact that more than 30,000 Native Americans had voluntarily fought in World War II “to fight for our institutions and American way of life” (Johnson in Rosier, 2006, p. 1310). Within settler-colonial institutions and systems, Indigenous peoples are frequently, if not always, seen as a threat. Indigenous power

undermines the very foundation of colonization and coloniality, therefore state and federal governments operate in perpetual suspicion of Indigeneity.

Throughout the United States, and in South Dakota specifically, this rhetoric echoes today in policies impacting education and young people. In 2020, Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13950 in order to “promote unity in the Federal workforce, and to combat offensive and anti-American race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating” (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020) The order explicitly drew upon anti-racist movements and rhetoric of equality as well as the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to condemn “a different version of America,” that is rooted in the belief that “America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country.” He names Critical Race Theory as “malign ideology” that is designed “to divide us and to prevent us from uniting as one people in pursuit of one common destiny for our great country” (p. 60683). A month prior to the issuance of this executive order, South Dakota governor Kristi Noem gave a speech to the Republican National Convention stating, “I’m here tonight because I believe America is an exceptional nation founded on three principles--equality, freedom, and opportunity. But today, our founding principles are under attack,” (Noem, 2020, para. 1) followed by “Our party respects individuals based on who they are. We don’t divide people based on their beliefs or roots” (Noem, 2020, para. 10). In a separate speech, she referred to two newly elected democrats as communists and condemned the “left’s indoctrination” that “takes place every day with kids all across America” (Noem, 2021a, para. 6). There’s a lot to tease apart in these excerpts, however of particular concern for this portion of this paper is the rhetoric of what it means to be American, the notion of communism being used to villainize others in ways reminiscent of the aforementioned termination era, and

the explicit reference to social justice movements in these arguments. This is the same strategy that was used during the termination era in order to justify termination policies, which had devastating effects on education outcomes for Indigenous students.

Furthermore, this language has been used in policymaking in South Dakota that directly impacts students, although not always through the lens of explicit Indian Education policies. For example, recently South Dakota passed House Bill 1217, which bans transgender girls from playing on girls' teams in sports. The bill requires students to sign a document stating their biological sex. After the bill was passed, the governor tweeted, "In South Dakota, we're celebrating International Women's Day by defending women's sports! I'm excited to sign this bill very soon" (Noem, 2021b). Similarly to Senate Bill 55 (2019), which requires "In God we trust" to be displayed in each public school in South Dakota, and a bill that followed it, House Bill 1224 (2021) which attempted to require "Under God the People Rule" to be displayed in every public school classroom, these laws fall on teachers, coaches, administrators, and other school district officials to enact. Each of these is intended to promote a certain vision of what is considered normal, acceptable, and publicly allowable in South Dakota. It is important to note that in Lakota cultural traditions, non-binary and transgender identities are thought about differently than in mainstream society. Specifically, in many Indigenous communities, individuals who identify as Two Spirit take on particularly important social and cultural roles (Pruden & Edmo, 2016). Furthermore, while many Indigenous peoples identify themselves as Christian, many do not. To attempt to regulate the experience of young people in the way that South Dakota has attempted (and succeeded, through the lens of policy) is a direct affront to sovereignty and self-determination in that it

aggressively perpetuates a dominant hegemonic discourse around a number of identities. In these particular cases, the state does so through the rhetoric of protecting liberty, equal rights, and good citizenship, making this type of control, in my opinion, dangerous to young people.

Even within the era of Self Determination (1968-present), laws governing education in South Dakota continue to be passed through the lens of maintaining the power of South Dakota as a settler state within a broader American empire. Even when these policies are not directly tied to Indian education, the messaging is clear: Through Self-Determination, schools still have a responsibility to ensure Americanness. Certainly, this limits the policy possibilities for Indigenous self-determination within colonial political systems. Currently, policies specifically connected to Indian education seem to be taking a tone of more explicit assimilatory purposes. Upon voting “no” to the establishment of public funding for community-based Oceti Sakowin schools, Senator Al Novstrup of Aberdeen, South Dakota stated, “In my town, it’s working. And I have a feeling this bill will break what’s working.” The “it” he was referring to was, specifically, integrating and assimilating Native American students into traditional public schools (Vondracek, 2021). In 2020 in South Dakota, 90% of white students graduated from high school compared with 53% of Native American students and many proponents of this bill believed that it would create the opportunity to use innovative solutions to address this particular gap along with other issues that haven’t been solved by the current public school education system. The Todd County School District on the Rosebud Reservation even issued a letter in support of the bill, despite the fact that the bill would divert funding from public schools into a charter school-like system. It is important to note that

this legislation was somewhat distinct from a typical charter school bill in that it would limit the number of schools that could be formed, the funding would be limited to Oceti Sakowin community schools, and public districts would be able to partner with community schools as well (Hendry, 2021). In the letter from Todd County, the school board advocated for a new option for their students in that it would alleviate the preference of test scores over more culturally based teaching practices (an effect of NCLB discussed earlier in this chapter). Senator Lee Schoenbeck of Codington county, South Dakota replied, “And I hope the residents of that school district take it out on that school board and make them do what they oughta do, which is help educate those young children and fight every problem we’re talking about. But they’re elected to do that! That’s local control. They’re right there on the ground and they have all the cash” (Hendry, 2021). Schoenbeck is one of the largest supporters in South Dakota of a program that issues tax credits to insurance companies for providing scholarships for students to attend private schools, similar to a school voucher program. His support for that program is premised on school choice for families (Haiar, 2024).

Between Senator Schoenbeck and Senator Novstrup’s commentary as well as the policies discussed earlier, it is clear that the state’s position is that assimilation is the explicit goal of schooling and that choices in schooling options must be mediated by the state. When Todd County advocated for something different, state actors called upon “local control.” In the “termination” era, many proponents of termination did the same. Rosier (2006) refers to this as the Cold War imperative of ethnic “integration” which advocates for “liberating” Indigenous peoples from their relationship with the federal government through dismantling funding sources and sovereign rights. This, furthermore,

actively ignores the requirement of the Self Determination act for meaningful consultation with tribes as well as the provisions set forth in the Every Student Succeeds Act to ensure conversations between institutions that serve Native American students. The termination era also, however, mobilized Indigenous peoples who established, “a well-organized campaign to divest them of sovereignty and land in part by using their own Cold War claim to an indigenous patriotism...challenging both American and Soviet propaganda by affirming the sacredness of the reservation” (Rosier, 2006, p. 1302).

Maintenance of a specific American identity, which is rooted in notions of individualism/independence, whiteness, cultural homogeneity, (Fryberg & Markus, 2007) and others discussed in this chapter so far is central to the tenets that anchor much of policymaking as it pertains to Indian education in the United States. In particular, many policies whether aimed at education specifically or not seem to address very specific threats to this identity. Namely, Native American identity, Native American land relationships, and Native American power/sovereignty are seen as needing to be controlled and the government, throughout time, has utilized similar strategies and employed similar rhetoric to attempt to address these “threats.” As a reminder, the perspective painted in this chapter so far is not intended to legitimize these “threats,” but to problematize and complicate the epistemological grounds upon which policymaking, specifically in South Dakota, takes place. The question I seek to ask here is not “what is wrong with people,” as so much research in Indigenous communities does, but rather, “what is wrong with the foundation that it continues to uphold a legacy of colonial and racist policies and enactments?” Because these perspectives have transcended history, and have traveled across time and policy levels, they must be understood as salient

factors that inform Indian education policy enactments in the United States. It may also be noticeable how interrelated these “threats” are. Depending upon the historical moment in time and the geographic location, each may play a different role, but all are typically present. For example, the root of the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny was in land acquisition, however the Indigenous peoples that occupied the land desired by settlers were seen as barriers. Therefore, individuals who occupied positions of power and authority established a discourse of difference based upon identity in order to justify taking the land, and also had to establish certain control over peoples (through institutions like slavery) in order to ensure there was minimal threat to the colonial project.

Indigenous land, identity, and power are often targets of policymaking due to how intertwined they are and due to how flagrantly the United States has tried to legitimize its illegitimate power.

**Part 2: How do scholars, Elders, knowledge holders and others define the relationship between these “tensions” (identity, land, and power) in transforming schooling?**

In 2012, Albert White Hat of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate shared with the world the teachings he had received from his community in his book *Zuya: Life's Journey*. He passed away shortly after, but his stories and the stories of local Elders and knowledge holders have long addressed the need for language and identity reclamation in response to colonization. Certainly, many of these knowledge systems and values existed prior to the abuses of power discussed in part one of this chapter, however when understood within the context of the present day, they take on an additional purpose of resistance. This resistance, however, is yet uniquely situated outside of the colonial discourses of power and politics and is more rooted in a right to live a life where one feels aligned to their

spiritual identity and able to embrace the value of Mitákuye Oyás'íŋ, or All My Relations. In what follows, I will explore how White Hat and others, including contemporary scholars, have taught about identity, land, and sovereignty/power both within and outside of the context of coloniality and for various purposes. My intention here is not to share traditional teachings, especially as a non-Native woman. In part one of this chapter, however, I outlined how Indigenous identity, land relationships, and power are often the targets of political attacks not because they are seen as weaknesses, but because they are seen as strengths that threaten the very existence of the United States as a settler state. This perspective has driven policymaking and classroom practice decisions for centuries. It is my hope now to explore how Indigenous identity, land relationships, and power are seen as assets rather than threats and to illuminate opportunities within the current political climate for these conceptualizations to thrive. I will explore this literature and these teachings through the lens of three domains of thought: Indigenous Identity and Education, Indigenous Land and Education, and Indigenous Power and Education. Similar to the previous section of this paper, however, it is important to note that these ideas do not necessarily live separate from one another and are often informed by one another in deep relationship. Separating them out in this way, however, allows for a more distinct analysis and the opportunity to illuminate areas to which this research can, should, and must contribute. I will draw upon an array of sources from a range of fields in order to understand how these concepts are linked to one another in response to colonization and independent of it, where possible.

### ***Indigenous Identity and Education***

The role of Indigenous language in identity development and understanding of self has long been a topic of research, writing, and teaching. Albert White Hat (2012) states:

So our language went through powerful changes, and this had a correspondingly powerful influence on us. It completely changed our view of ourselves from pre-reservation times. Take a child of four or five out of the home and put him in a boarding school, forbid him to speak his language, and after twelve or fifteen years he will have lost it altogether. He will no longer know who he really is. (p. 19)

What White Hat is exploring here is the fundamental belief that, as stated in Chapter One, language has deep epistemic meaning and, therefore, is an influencing factor in how we understand both the world around us and ourselves. Similarly, theorists within the fields of Critical Policy Studies and decolonial theory have often concerned themselves with notions of ideology and related action. Spillane (2004), for example, has examined the connection between personal agendas and policy interpretations. Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, and Braun (2011) have examined the notion of “discursive formations” and the ways in which policies themselves “can be regarded as representations of knowledge and power, discourses that construct a topic” (p. 597). They continue their argument by making the claim that policy discourses actually become embedded into daily schooling practices and connote explicit meanings in those spaces. Furthermore, Frantz Fanon explores the role of colonization in developing hegemonic structures that are both economic and cultural, and wherein “colonized peoples see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer as the marginalized other” (Fanon in Stoddart, 2007, p. 214). White Hat explores this notion

further, albeit in a different context and for a slightly different purpose. He describes the evolution of Lakota language to take on meanings outside of traditional conceptualizations. For example, he shares about Reservation slang and how the meaning of the word “Makuje” has shifted from the feeling of having a hard time to being associated with alcohol use and now is utilized to describe a hangover. White Hat connects this conversation to how the education system on the Reservation has functioned to “make us totally dependent on authority, secular or religious...We were not taught skills to foster independence and self-sufficiency. We were taught to depend on some authorized organization or another” (White Hat, 2006, p. 19). This is in tension with scholarship that identifies a dominant emphasis on independence and individualism, discussed earlier (Fryberg and Markus, 2007). One possible extrapolation here is that independence is a cornerstone of American education, unless the student is not already assimilated and socialized into Euro-Christian values systems. Essentially, language use shifted over time to become co-opted by hegemonic social discourses and stereotypes around Indigenous identity. There is a great deal of movement today, however, to reclaim Lakota language usage and to develop educators in learning the language (whether they are Lakota or not) as well as to practice cultural ceremonies and traditions that were once forced underground (White Hat, 2012). This prioritization centers the role of education around validating student identity, language, and epistemologies through curricular decisions and classroom practice, but also to consider non-formal settings as powerful spaces to share this knowledge. In the words of Luther Standing Bear, “Today, we should be perpetuating history instead of destroying it, and this can only be effectively done by allowing and encouraging the young to keep it alive” (1960, p. 232).

Within recent scholarship, student identity, including language specifically, has become a focal point in progressive approaches to pedagogy. Paris (2012) offers an overview of these conceptual and practical frameworks as well as how they have shifted over time. He clearly delineates deficit approaches to education, which “viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome” (Paris, 2012, p. 93), from difference approaches (the idea that languages and literacies are equal to but different from dominant norms) and resource approaches (linguistic, cultural, and literacy practices should be honored and extended). While different in their orientations to students, difference and deficit approaches implicitly and explicitly require that students of color “give up” their cultural, linguistic, and literate practices in order to adopt those necessary to access opportunities within dominant academic and social spaces. This echoes assimilationist practices that have been used for centuries in government-funded schooling for Indigenous students. Resource pedagogies, on the other hand, ask teachers to redefine those spaces in order to honor and nurture students’ identities. Perhaps the most seminal of these pedagogical approaches, Ladson-Billings’ *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (1995), aims to support students in academic achievement, becoming culturally competent, and developing a robust critique of the “existing social order” (p. 474). Paris (2012) argues that “relevance” and “responsiveness” discussed by Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2010), and other scholars do not require actually sustaining and supporting bi/multilingualism and bi/multiculturalism within rapidly changing societies, nor do they honor the “linguistic and cultural dexterity and plurality necessary for success and access in our demographically changing U.S. and global schools and communities” (p. 95). He

advocates for a new term, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, that attempts to address this. While there are many approaches, the message across resource pedagogies is clear: teachers must be working to help students understand and sustain their own identities in multiple ways while simultaneously helping students access and navigate dominant spaces. Villegas and Lucas' (2002) approach to Culturally Responsive Teaching provides an outline of teacher dispositions towards diversity that must be cultivated in teacher education in order to enact resource pedagogies. Their main argument is that teachers are not trained to be oriented to diversity in a way that effectively prepares them for the reality of a dramatically changing demographic climate. Their strands of sociocultural consciousness, an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, commitment and skills to act as agents of change, constructivist views of learning, learning about students, and culturally responsive teaching practices, "serve as the organizing framework for infusing attention to diversity throughout the teacher education curriculum" (p. 30) in order to develop teachers as culturally responsive practitioners. Both Paris (2012) and Villegas and Lucas (2002), however, argue that some approaches to resource pedagogies can result in reductionist views of culture and a "watering down" of the approaches themselves. Bartlett (2005) explores this phenomenon explicitly, albeit through a lens of Freirean (1993) pedagogy, upon which much of the discourse on resource pedagogies draws. She focuses specifically on aspects of dialogue, knowledge production, and relationships between teachers and students—all aspects of the sociocultural consciousness called for by Villegas and Lucas (2002), but in a non-formal education space (Brazilian nongovernmental organizations). Freire's approach to literacy, according to Bartlett, recommends "that literacy teachers conduct ethnographic research

in the students' community, document their linguistic universe, draw 'generative themes' and key words from that local culture, and engage in a dialogical process with students to elaborate a social analysis" (p. 347) that empowers students to develop the critical sociocultural consciousness described by Villegas and Lucas (2002). Her findings were concurrent with the assertions of Paris (2012) and Villegas and Lucas (2002) in that teachers and teacher educators have a tendency to reduce the core of Freirean pedagogy (and resource pedagogies) "to a local psychodynamic and substituted for the very difficult work of forging, together, a praxis to understand and address social inequalities" (p. 362). Savage et al. (2011) further explored the use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in classroom practice through analyzing student experiences in relation to teacher practices in New Zealand. Their study was specific to Indigenous Māori students and focused largely on teacher professional development and its effectiveness at developing an "effective teacher profile." This profile, similar to Villegas and Lucas' strands, identified effective Culturally Responsive teacher characteristics as: care for students as Māori, high expectations, strong management, student engagement, reflective practice, technical expertise, and knowledge sharing.

Like the aforementioned authors, Savage et al. (2011) identify a "lack of connection between the culture of the school and student" that has resulted in low expectations for Māori students and leading to "high suspension rates, over-representation in special education, low educational attainment, and leaving school early with fewer qualifications than students from dominant cultural groups" (pp. 183-184). They found that, as a result of professional development specifically designed to develop Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, some teachers' classroom practices shifted, however not

all teachers made the changes necessary to create welcoming and culturally affirming classroom climates. Furthermore, even when teachers did try to enact changes, other factors within the school potentially caused challenges for Culturally Responsive Pedagogies. They suggest that “educationalists generally—not just teachers—must play a role in ensuring that reform enables young people to learn without sacrificing who they are” (p. 196). Finally, Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist’s (2003) comparative study of curricular materials for Indigenous students in the United States and Australia found that the deculturalization of Indigenous students in these two countries is promoted by both curricula and teaching methodologies. While some programs in the United States and Australia require “that multicultural content be infused through the entire teacher education program” (p. 87), the case studies conducted serve as evidence that “not all teachers receive this kind of teacher education or translate it into classroom practice” (p. 87). They center their study within a historical overview of colonization and the perpetuation of what Paris (2012) might refer to as “deficit pedagogies,” or the intention of schools and educators to replace students’ culture with a different one. In their conclusion, Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003) state that “teachers and teacher educators need to study alternative epistemologies, multiple perspectives, and critical multicultural pedagogies, including both-ways curricula, which would lead them to different ways of educating” (p. 89) and to take experimental approaches to curriculum and methods development.

Overall, the literature on resource pedagogies, whether specific to Indigenous education or not, is helpful in understanding the importance and potential of validating student identity through curricular decisions. Furthermore, this literature offers helpful

teacher dispositions that can be developed in teacher preparation programs to, hopefully, ensure that teachers are oriented towards their students in ways that sustain cultural, linguistic, and literate knowledges. While all of the authors situate their studies and perspectives within the historical and dehumanizing tradition of contemporary schooling systems, all of them focus on teachers, their identities, and their practice as barriers toward humanizing student experiences.

Situating the arguments in this way is problematic in a few ways. First, it assumes that if teachers have the “right” dispositions, they will be able to enact practices that are culturally affirming for students, without considering the influence of additional forces, whether overtly political or ideological. This framing further assumes that students are not agential and are dependent upon teachers for cultural affirmation. Additionally, all of the articles focused almost entirely upon teacher actions and positionality, which seems to position teachers as the sole actors in students’ educational experiences. While this may in fact be a result of the audiences for whom the works were written, I argue that this makes inclusion of non-formal and informal education experiences and spaces even more crucial. White Hat and Standing Bear, among others, recognize that school is not the primary, let alone sole, space where students learn. Family spaces, but also social conditions and constructions of language, spirituality, and other elements of identity inform how young people experience their own history and self-knowledge. They also inform teacher, administrator, and policymaker actions. This is not to situate youth identity purely within a historical context, but to offer the importance of considering how students understand themselves within any context is an important factor in thinking about what a culturally affirming education could look like. It is also crucial to take into

account the range of socialized and ideological understandings of education stakeholders. While Savage et al. (2011) mentioned a need to explore more thoroughly the roles of administrators and policymakers in dehumanizing schooling experiences for Indigenous youth, there is little research done in this area.

Conclusively, the literature reviewed on resource pedagogies and Culturally Responsive practices generally asserts that teachers must develop critical capacities, wrestle with complexity of both their own identities and those of their students, and help students access dominant academic and political structures without sacrificing who they are in order to move away from the historical purpose of schooling as assimilatory and into a more humanizing future. It does not, however, generally acknowledge all of the additional actors who are engaged in creating the present educational realities for and with young people and communities, whether for better or for worse. There is a baseline understanding in this body of work that colonization and systemic racism have developed the present reality of schooling, however the responsibility of disrupting this falls almost exclusively on teachers and teacher educators to develop the “right” worldviews needed to dismantle oppressive systems, and the end goal of this disruption is situated around academic success as a major factor in equity. Finally, the literature also does not typically take up issues the role of broader Federal and State policy in the curricular decisions of educators, thus demonstrating the need to engage scholarship on student identity affirmation alongside the scholarship on Critical Policy Studies.

### ***Indigenous Land and Education***

When the Dakota Access Pipeline was being built and water protectors were living at the various camps in the area, Alayna Eagle Shield founded Mní Wičhóni

Nakíčiziŋ Owáyawa, the Defenders of the Water School, on Standing Rock. Much of the work of the school was focused on language and cultural traditions from the various tribes who were represented at the camp, however the school also focused on core subject areas as well as advocacy around South Dakota homeschool laws (Tuck, 2020). This school is one manifestation of land education or place-based education that responded to a specific need in the context at that time. Tuck et al. (2014) argue for the “necessity of centering historical and current contexts of colonization in education on and in relation to land” (p. 1) in a way that is reminiscent of the social and political critique required within Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies. This is not the only reason for contextualizing education that is present in the literature that connects land and pedagogy. Brayboy and Castagno (2009) for example argue that contextualizing/localizing curriculum, practice, and pedagogy should serve the purpose of ensuring that schooling resembles, reinforces, and honors local community epistemologies. It is also important to note that much of the literature that discusses land-based learning and local/contextual curriculum centers local languages and literacies in a manner that is similar to the literature on identity. The three pieces are, in many cases, inseparable from one another. Additionally, Castagno and Brayboy posit that schooling for self-determination requires centering on local community knowledge for the broader purpose of academic success.

Tuck et al. and Castagno and Brayboy’s perspectives are not necessarily different in essence but they are distinct in approach, with Tuck et al. centering contexts of colonization and Castagno and Brayboy centering local epistemologies. Brayboy’s previous work (2005) acknowledges the inseparable nature of colonization from society and it could be argued that self-determination is not a politically constructed concept

without the notion of colonization itself. Teaching with contextualized understanding, honoring local knowledges, and connection to land, therefore, can be interpreted as a form of resistance to colonizing practices and history. This is not always the purpose, however. Alayna Eagle Shield (in Tuck, 2020) states:

When we come to these education institutions and we're expect[ed] to learn their teachings, but really, in our head we're constantly decoding, we're constantly resisting, we're constantly speaking up and standing up.... That, to me, is resistance, but speaking about language, it's natural. It's a part of what we're supposed to be doing...So then we have to shift our way of thinking that we're not fighting anything, but when we speak it, we're honoring ourselves and our ancestors. (p. 4)

What Eagle Shield's perspective raises is the need for resistance as well as for the speaking of Lakota language to be inherently life-giving, an acknowledgment of self and those who came before. This complexly situates local knowledge within and outside of the context of colonization simultaneously, and while I am not necessarily advocating for one perspective over the other, I do think it is crucial to understand the multiple views and hold them in relationship with one another rather than as distinctly separate.

There is a distinction between localized knowledge and land-based education, both of which are used as literature bases in this section. Like everything else in this chapter so far, however, they are not necessarily separate from one another nor are they the same. When authors write about land-based education, they are typically discussing ecological knowledge or an environmentally-focused approach to education "by first recognizing the deep physical, mental, and spiritual connection to the land that is a part of

Indigenous cultures” (Cherpako, 2019). This type of learning is unique to the geographic, cultural, and historical context within which it is situated. Local knowledge more broadly refers to the “knowledge, beliefs, traditions, practices, institutions, and worldviews developed and sustained by Indigenous and local communities, and are believed to represent an adaptive strategy to the environment in which these communities live” (Vandebroek et al., 2011, p. 1). The distinction is nuanced, but the common theme is that in both areas of scholarship, land is seen as a central element in informing the very purpose of education as well as the nature of knowledge itself. Additionally, both approaches to practice involve values systems, generally informed by place and pre-dating both colonizing land policies as well as extractive and exploitative relationships with land. This doesn’t mean, however, that values systems aren’t impacted or informed by colonization. Amanda Holmes and Norma González (2017) state, “Indigenous communities hold different priorities and aspirations that arise out of this distinctness as Peoples, a context of enduring presence and relationship with homelands now occupied and colonized by settler societies” (p. 216). LeAnne Simpson (2004) also elaborates on the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and colonization stating

Anticolonial strategies for the recovery of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge systems require a deconstruction of the colonial thinking and its relationship to [Indigenous Knowledge]...the recovery of Indigenous intellectual traditions, Indigenous control over Indigenous national territories, the protection of Indigenous lands from environmental destruction, and educational opportunities that are anticolonial in their political orientation and firmly rooted in traditions of their nations. (p. 381)

Holmes and González and Simpson clearly link traditional knowledge, land, policy, and resistance to education in their work. Holmes and González also identify that this particular type of land-based knowledge or place-based knowledge is part of a cycle and, therefore, subject to change over time, but that the concepts of, “interconnected, intergenerational relationality as a means of surviving, of living in a good way, and of transformational, resurging continuance” (p. 219) are core anchors.

Indigenous scholars, knowledge holders, and Elders have long placed land at the center of understanding, learning, and knowledge creation. Within Lakota epistemology, specifically, land, and everything within it, is seen as a relative who should be treated with respect and care (White Hat, 2012). This relationship requires reciprocity, mutuality, and generosity in ways that allow both human and non-human relatives to thrive. This is in contrast with colonial notions of land, that see it as a resource from which we must extract materials to ensure our survival without typically returning, replenishing, and caring for the land. The Lakota Nation, however, is not the only Indigenous Nation that centers relationality with land as a core relationship that provides material and physical resources, but also instructions on how to live in a good way. Many Indigenous scholars write about this. Simpson (2014), for example discusses notions of relationality, reciprocity, and consent are values that can be learned from relationship with land and that must extend into educational systems that seek to Indigenize pedagogical approaches. Additionally, McGregor (2006) identifies relationships with land as central to developing sensemaking practices and complexity of understanding, a belief also taken up by Meyer (2011), Salmon (2000), and Windchief (2020), although in unique and distinctive ways. McGregor (2006), for example, identifies that Traditional Ecological

Knowledge (TEK) can provide clear instructions for how to live, but must be understood within specific contexts, due to the diverse array of Indigenous perspectives and contexts relative to land. She discusses TEK's influence in environmental education and sustainability, specifically. She also identifies TEK as a starting point to understanding current ecological conditions and a "basis from which to work toward solutions" (p. 2).

Meyer (2011), similarly, expresses the importance of developing deep, meaningful relationships with both place and people in order to understand "what that place and people have to teach" (p. 57). This implies that teachings will be different relative to the place and people informing them, which is starkly different from approaches to standardization seen so often in education systems today. Furthermore, Salmon (2000) also identifies the necessity to be in deep relationship with land and non-human relations as a fundamental aspect of not only learning and knowledge, but survival. The author also names that, as such, we are also responsible for all surrounding life's survival. Windchief (2020) identifies similar relationships, recognizing that groundedness in place-based knowledge as well as a physical, mental, and spiritual connection to land also includes a deep connection to "the web of flora and fauna that all have a place in maintaining life."

Many of the texts and stories examined here offer fundamental similarities around relationality and reciprocity. In addition, they also explore the importance of learning from the land as a process by which individuals and peoples determine their values and belief systems. A third shared component of these texts is that they also acknowledge the importance of meaning-making in complex ways that connect the physical, mental, and spiritual aspect of one's life in order to understand and build knowledge. Much of this

literature also centers on the importance of Indigenous languages, similarly to the literature on identity. This weaves together the idea that land and identity are deeply intertwined, informed by one another, and relational in nature. This literature, however, differs from the texts I examined on identity in a distinct way that has been briefly named already. This difference lies in the key role of colonization and how it is navigated in the literature. In the work that focused on identity, social critique is a fundamental aspect of pedagogy, and is required for the process of decolonization. In some of this literature, social critique is one of the main purposes of education. In the literature focused on land, however, social critique is present and foundational, however emphasis is placed upon reclamation of relationships as a key component of decolonization and purpose of education. The authors typically acknowledge colonization as a force that works against the lifeways and worldviews presented, but the goal of reclaiming those lifeways is not always explicitly to decolonize, although this may likely be a product of the process. There is an inherent tone of resistance that is informed by a critique and understanding of colonial processes. Emphasis, however, is placed upon the alternatives, regenerating and revitalizing ways of knowing and being that existed prior to the initiation of the colonial project.

As an educator, this signifies to me the equal importance of breaking down barriers and co-creating a world that honors creation simultaneously. Where the literature on identity tends to focus on persistent and present barriers, the literature on land offers perspectives on creating, reclaiming, and defining a desired state. Both are necessary. On one hand, the literature on identity allows for the explicit naming of how education has historically been used to dehumanize students within a racist system (Paris, 2012) and

what could be done, in terms of teacher knowledge and skills, and beliefs to begin to remedy this situation (Freire, 2006; Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2003; Savage, 2011; Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Included in this is helping students to develop a critique of the world around them that is rooted in sociohistorical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and ensuring that students have an educational experience that honors their cultural and linguistic identities (Paris, 2012). These components also exist within the body of literature that relates to land and education. Much of this work centers context, both historical and epistemological (Tuck et al., 2014; Brayboy, 2005) for the broader purpose of reclaiming relationships to self and ancestral knowledge. The priorities and purposes of education and this contextualizing within this literature, therefore, will vary relative to the community, Tribal nation, or individual (Holmes and González, 2017). Both bodies of work are undoubtedly rooted in a rejection of the colonial project and a deep approximation to the historical context and losses that have taken place as a result of that project. Additionally, the body of literature that is focused on land and education does not predominantly focus on formal education spaces as a vehicle for developing knowledge and understanding. In fact, this work does not often bring up formal schooling at all. This is an important component of the literature that requires me to more broadly consider the forces outside of education that inform educational realities.

Much of the literature reviewed here on land-based epistemologies and pedagogies acknowledges agency in a way that differs greatly from the previous section. While identity-based work seems to focus primarily on the school and educators to honor the languages and literacies of students, this body of work places the onus of responsibility on the individual, in relationship with land, to derive meaning. This process

can take place individually or collectively, but always occurs in an iterative cycle of sensemaking that evolves over time, is centered in place, and is focused on developing beliefs and worldviews. In the context of this research, this body of work requires me to consider all of the forces at play in constructing knowledge and understanding, which would include the political context of the place within which I am hoping to conduct that research. This differs from the work in the previous section primarily in the sense that it recognizes that there are many spheres of influence that need to be understood in order to move forward. Moving forward, in the context of this literature, would be largely dependent upon place and the individual or community within that space. This means that, in contrast to the work on identity and education, the end goal might be for academic success as it is typically defined, but it might not. In the words of Manulani Meyer (2003),

We are trying to articulate a new/ancient consciousness that is no longer interested in why Hawaiian youth don't score as well as their Anglo-American counterparts on the SAT. That is not our question. It is, rather, a matter of interpretation--of redefining the things of value with regard to knowledge and how we wish to live out our lives. We have choices here. I know we do not think we do--it is the nature of oppression and control embedded in well-meaning directives to keep volition a rare experience and expression of self a crime. (p. 56)

### ***Indigenous Power and Education***

There has been a great deal of research done on the topic of power and its intersection with, influence upon, and relationship to schooling and education. For the purposes of this review of literature, I will focus primarily on literature that centers

Indigenous contexts and notions of cultural and political sovereignty. Because concepts of self-determination and sovereignty are often used in relationship to each other, it is important to distinguish between the two, as both will be used within this section.

Sovereignty, broadly, can be defined as the right of a people to self-govern. It refers to inherent rights to sustain communities and Tribal nations and to self-rule. Self-Determination, as defined by the United Nations, is the expression or action of sovereignty (United Nations (General Assembly), 2007). By some definitions, the notion of sovereignty is connected to European concepts and enactments of authority and control whereas self-determination exists independent from outside powers (Gilio-Whitaker, 2013). Conversely, some scholars and organizations argue that recognition of Tribal sovereignty is crucial to the political rights of Indigenous Nations as peoples and honoring the government-to-government relationship that Tribal nations have with the federal government (Kalt and Singer, 2004). Certainly, the complexity of understandings of both self-determination and sovereignty could, in and of themselves, be the source of research on their own and, indeed, have been. In what follows, I will attempt to understand some of these perspectives in order to clarify how Indigenous scholars, knowledge holders, Elders, and others conceptualize these in all their complexity.

Historically, the United States federal government has recognized the sovereignty of Indigenous Nations as political entities (United States Constitution, Article 1, § 8). Wilkins and Lomawaima (2002), however, identify an inherent tension here. They note that the United States claims plenary power over Tribes (including their resources and policies), while also claiming to support the sovereignty of Tribal nations. These two concepts, federal plenary power and tribal sovereignty, cannot coexist with another and

make up an irreconcilable problem in Indian law and policy (Wilkins and Lomawaima, 2002, p. 99). The authors continue to disaggregate the notion of “plenary,” specifically. They identify three definitions of the term including “exclusive,” “preemptive,” and “unlimited and absolute.” They support the first two definitions of the term, identifying that they are appropriate uses of plenary power in ways that can be used to protect tribes from state intrusion (preemptive) while being limited to congressional activity (exclusive), rather than extending to the judicial or executive branches of government, among other limitations.

Coffey and Tsosie (2001), however, challenge this notion, stating, “In a world where tribal political sovereignty is dependent upon federal acknowledgement, Indian nations will always be vulnerable to restrictions on their sovereignty, and perhaps even the total annihilation of their sovereignty” (p. 194). Further, they call for a reimagining of tribal sovereignty that is based in Indigenous conceptualizations. They refer to this as “cultural sovereignty,” in that it is concerned with Indigenous values, norms, and futures. Similarly, the Indigenous Environmental Network (2021) delineates between Tribal sovereignty and Indigenous sovereignty, identifying that the former requires special provisions for Indian nations for government programs and that over time, the nation state has sought to limit Tribal sovereignty as part of assimilation efforts. Indigenous sovereignty, they argue, exists outside of the nation-state and is inherent. This type of sovereignty and power, however, is also consistently under attack by federal and state governments. Natural resource extraction and other issues of environmental justice, they argue, are attacks on Indigenous sovereignty that seek to threaten Indigenous knowledge

systems, spiritual practices, and relationships. It is in this example that the connection between power, identity, and language becomes very clear.

This particular conceptualization of sovereignty, whether defined as Indigenous sovereignty or cultural sovereignty, is spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical, requires dialogue among Indigenous peoples, and must be defined by Indigenous peoples (Coffey and Tsosie, 2001). It focuses on the future, nation-building, and traditional forms of governance that pre-dated European “discovery.”

Holmes and González (2017) situate self-determination within the context of relationality, resistance, and sustenance. They argue that centering Indigenous epistemologies creates the capacity for understanding and responding to the complex layers of knowledge related to community, cultural and spiritual practices, and self-development. This knowledge, carried by Elders and Knowledge Keepers, ancestral in nature and continuously evolving, holds the power to sustain Indigenous peoples both independent of and in response to colonization. Albert White Hat (2012) discusses a similar belief. “Growing up with our language and some of our traditional practices helped me to survive in the years after I graduated high school” (p. 6). In these texts, the connection between Indigenous self-determination, survival, and resurgence is intimately connected to traditional teachings, including language and land-based pedagogies. Specifically, however, White Hat connects self-determination to spirituality and the way of life that it instructs. He names that the power in these practices, however, lies in understanding why traditions are important, understanding how those traditions came to be, and embodying the connection to them. This is fairly connected to a portion of the literature on identity, some of which argues that cultural practices often get diluted within

schooling settings. While the purposes and approaches differ, the key aspects of understanding complexity, purpose, and process are fundamental and clearly identified.

Taking a lead from White Hat and Holmes and González, education systems that seek to sustain power, self-determination, and Indigenous sovereignty would need to be rooted in localized conceptualizations of knowledge and education. Ismail and Cazden (2005), similarly, argue for alternatives to rigid regulations that concern curriculum, assessment, teacher certification, and other schooling policies. They point to examples where possibilities for alternatives have been made including the incorporation of Māori language into national assessments in New Zealand, alternative school standards in Alaska, and conversations illuminating Ramah Navajo perspectives on education purposes. They also, however, differentiate between a shift in practice and a shift in grounding theoretical frameworks, naming that the former often positions education for self-determination through the lens of an “add-on” subject rather than “just what we do” (p. 90).

Enos (2015), who understands sovereignty through the lens of cultural survival beyond political and governmental functions, also advocates for a creative and new approach to schooling that holds space for multiple purposes. She shares how Pueblo leaders “helped me understand that just as measuring achievement only through standardized testing is inappropriate, so, too, is ignoring standardized achievement scores within the context of their import in today’s world” (p. 29). She argues that sovereignty requires an understanding at the student level of both Indigenous and Western lifeways. Her argument that protecting traditional ways of life involves working within “mainstream Western society” is often a topic of discussion within the context where I

work as well. The anchoring idea to Enos' conceptualization of "deep sovereignty," however, is that it requires schooling and education to serve purposes identified by Indigenous peoples. This requires robust dialogue and understanding at multiple levels. Further, Augustine Romero (2014) describes the Mexican American/raza studies program that employed some of the theoretical constructs of incorporating Indigenous knowledges and Western ones to disrupt a historically oppressive education environment in Tucson, Arizona. The program focused on honoring student identity, building critical consciousness, and utilizing the critically compassionate intellectualism (CCI) model. The program was successful in both narrowing the "achievement gap" between Mexican American students and their peers, and it raised college matriculation rates for Mexican American students as well as almost eliminated suspension and expulsion rates for those students. While this program became a "battle for educational sovereignty," (p. 52), it was the result of a massive community organizing effort, educators' responses to community and student demands, and a deep desire by students, their families, and teachers to create a more equitable schooling structure. It should be noted that there were massive policy barriers and legal battles that threatened the program over years. Community elders were arrested for advocating for the program (p. 58), and it was eventually disbanded. The program, like many policy changes that benefit Indigenous students, came as the result of community action and resistance. As described in chapter one, however, these enactments of Indigenous sovereignty are often met with hostile state and federal policies, as was the case in this particular example. That does not change, however, the fact that it was rooted in localized understandings of the responsibility of schooling. In light of this, it is critical to understand Willow's (2013) conceptualization

of sovereignty as processual and action-based. She argues that “sovereignty may be most fruitfully contemplated not as a definable object or objective but instead as a *process* that is diversely enacted by contemporary indigenous citizens” (p. 872). This understanding does not necessarily separate sovereignty from legal and political interpretations of the term, but it does center our focus on exploring the *how* of sovereignty rather than the *what*.

Among the texts explored here on the topic of power, specifically through the lens of sovereignty, a few trends emerge. Almost all of the authors advocate for localized, community-defined conceptualizations of sovereignty, schooling, and knowledge. This disrupts the notion that sovereignty can be something bestowed upon Tribes and Indigenous peoples via the federal government. In this sense, sovereignty and self-determination exist in multiple ways and in multiple spaces. They are embedded within the policy rhetoric of federal and state governments and, therefore, occupy a specific set of legal principles that have historically been used in both paternalistic ways and as a source of legal precedent for self-government. Sovereignty and self-determination, however, also exist outside the realm of politics and governance as an inherent right. Indigenous enactments of this right look different in different settings and are dependent upon Indigenous worldviews. Despite the complexity of definitions and understandings of these, however, Indigenous scholars argue for evolving understandings of sovereignty. In general, they should be rooted in traditional understandings and worldviews relative to the Indigenous peoples who are defining them, but also responsive to contemporary context and needs, as defined by Indigenous peoples. This requires a re-imagining of

sovereignty and self-determination that is both traditional and evolving simultaneously. It is contextual, agile, historically situated, and enacted in ongoing processes.

Understanding self-determination and sovereignty as connected to but also distinct from federally defined notions is important because it both denies the federal government's authority to control Indigenous power, while also leaving space to hold government entities accountable for their attempts to undermine the political sovereignty of Indigenous nations. While these complex definitions do not preclude policymakers and policymaking bodies from enacting their own interpretations of self-determination in paternalistic and/or assimilationist ways, they also aid in making possible the sustained resistance of Indigenous peoples to problematic federal and state policies. I am hesitant to lean too far in either direction in terms of definitions and understandings, as I believe the complexity here is valuable and necessary. Additionally, it is clear that regardless of how sovereignty and self-determination are defined, they are inseparable from political context. Similarly to the literature on identity explored previously, this literature does not shy away from the role of colonization and resistance to it as a fundamental role in education processes, whether formal or informal.

### **Summary and Implications for Research**

In a broad overview of federal and state education policies that have impacted Indigenous students in South Dakota, trends emerged around Indigenous identity, land relationships, and power as perceived threats to American identity. These are areas that policymakers, both historically and today, have sought to control through assimilation tactics, even when they are classified as self-determination policies or when they exist within the current federal policy era of "Self-Determination." Understanding Indigenous

perspectives on identity, land, and power, therefore, is crucial to disrupting assimilationist practices and attempting to reimagine education and schooling as capable of delivering on Indigenous definitions and conceptualizations of self-determination.

The literature reviewed here offers deeply connected and intimately intertwined understandings of identity, land, and power. As an added layer of complexity, each of these components individually encompass multiple interpretations both connected to and independent of coloniality. A central tension explored in chapter one refers to the idea that despite the prevalence of Tribal Self-Determination-based policies, students and their families in the context where I work (the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota) often experience schools as sites of devaluation. This supports the notion that, while there is a great deal of research around what educators should do in order to change this reality, that research has not had a consistent impact on teacher, administrator, and broader schooling practices or systemic policy decisions.

This research is concerned with how the enactment of policies is informed by social conditions, sociohistorical context, individual and collective sense-making, and how policy actors navigate their own visions of s/Self-Determination in schooling spaces. The literature reviewed here suggests that each of these bodies of work would likely offer a different perspective on this particular curiosity. The body of literature on identity, for example, might respond that individuals and systems are focused on perpetuating a hegemonic state and, therefore, policy actors must be used to disrupt this process through strengthening and supporting student and community identity. The body of literature on land-based epistemologies and pedagogies would likely acknowledge and support this purpose, but would focus on the necessity to build a deep, contextualized relationship

with land and human and non-human relatives in order to understand better ways to live in alignment with ourselves. Finally, the body of literature on power would likely call for individuals to utilize their agency to understand complexity, be responsive to contextually-defined needs, and to imagine different ways of being that are informed by history and contemporary context. While each section of literature seems to take a clear stance on how individuals *should* respond to policies that are rooted in coloniality, I initially recognized a fundamental gap in that the literature tends to leave out the reality of how individuals actually *do* this in practice. These initial thoughts have since been disrupted and slightly repurposed, as explored in what follows.

While governments, both Tribal and federal, pass policies impacting Indigenous students, it is clear that educators, administrators, and other school district personnel become the vehicle for enacting these policies. One of the things that this review of literature has made markedly clear for me, however, is the reality that ideologies of identity, land, and power are either deeply understood and enacted in powerful ways that support resistance, survival, and resurgence or become historically socialized ideologies that support the continuance of a hegemonic state. There is a clear trend in most of the literature that the former requires understanding, capacity for complexity, connectedness, and an ability to imagine and re-imagine. Furthermore, each of the bodies of literature offer unique perspectives on how understandings of agency, purpose, and identity develop and evolve.

Certainly, my takeaways are informed by my own social location and positionality, and another reader may have different interpretations. For the purposes of this research, however, I believe that these may be critical components to understanding

how individuals within education systems (both Tribal and public) enact policies in service of self-determination (or not). It is here, at the intersection of imagination and recognition of hostile political reality that I situate my research questions. The literature has led me to believe that how we talk about, contextualize, and imagine self-determination may have a massive impact on how it is enacted. Given these considerations, my research question is: What is the relationship between Tribal Self-Determination policies and enactments, Tribal-serving schools, and Tribal and non-Tribal education stakeholders in South Dakota, and what does this dynamic illuminate about the story of educational development for Indigenous students in the state?

I believe that history, ideology, and policy play major roles in impacting the capacity of educators, administrators, local education officers, and students to imagine and enact Lakota visions of sovereignty, as diverse and complex as they may be. In many ways, this imagining takes place every day and informs resistances to hegemonic practices that seek to undermine the agency of students, specifically. In many other ways, however, policies have created a hostile environment that intentionally limits our ability to collectively imagine, leading to the continued replication of harmful, dominant practices and pedagogies. In exploring this research question, I seek to understand how self-determination is being understood and enacted daily and what, therefore, are the opportunities for collective action toward self-determination for Lakota students.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods**

The relationship between Tribal Self-Determination policies and enactments, tribal-serving schools, and tribal and non-tribal education stakeholders in South Dakota has long been informed by (and has informed) the social conditions and context surrounding the policy landscape at any given point in time. Each of the three major bodies of work explored in this research so far offer complex ways of understanding these relationships. Scholars of Critical Policy Studies (Maguire et al., 2015; Shore & Wright, 1997) explore the relationship between policy and society through the lens of policy enactment, wherein policies are not simply a process of implementation, but rather undergo a series of negotiations and, “social, cultural, and emotional construction and interpretation” (Maguire et al., 2015). Scholars of coloniality (Cusicanqui, 2012; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009; Valenzuela, 2019) have identified the ways in which dominant hegemonic forces have continued to attempt to maintain oppressive power structures in society through control of economy, authority, the public sphere, and knowledge/subjectivity (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). When understood through a CPS lens, coloniality implicates policy as a vehicle for attempted hegemonic control, but also as a potential site of resistance as colonial attempts are navigated in complex ways by individuals. Scholars of Indigenous Education have articulated how historical context has impacted education for Indigenous students today and have made a clear call for continued resistance to continued attempts to assimilate and acculturate Indigenous students into dominant Western ideologies. Their calls to educators require the understanding of sociohistorical context and how it impacts individual and collective decisions in the education of Indigenous students.

These three areas of study provide a grounding frame for this research. As such, a research design that allowed for complexity, opportunities to understand social conditions and their relationships to policies and people, and that centered the experiences of policy actors as a way to understand the connections between policies and enactments was necessary. Furthermore, the story of s/Self-Determination policy enactment in South Dakota is intertwined with notions of identity, history, power, and relationships. It was crucial, therefore, to identify a research method that allowed me to embrace the depth of meaning-making that individuals go through in a way that honored the multilayered identities (Mahajan, 2002; Takeda and Williams, 2018) that inform how individuals make sense of sociohistorical context, their location in that context, and their understandings of their own roles in the policy enactment process. Additionally, Chapter Two outlines the main ideological and epistemic tensions that, I believe, characterize policymaking and policy enactment in South Dakota. Conceptually, these tensions constitute the social conditions that contextualize education policy today and create the epistemic grounds that must be navigated by policy actors, whether consciously or sub-consciously. These tensions are rooted in a framework of (de)coloniality, which, as previously discussed, is concerned with notions of power, process, history, and hegemony. With all of these considerations in mind, I chose to utilize an adapted approach to Critical Ethnography to explore the research questions for this study. This chapter will explore and explain the many considerations I considered when choosing a research tradition to apply to my research questions and the processes, procedures, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

### **Methodology: The Journey to (Critical) Ethnography**

As a non-Indigenous woman living and working within an Indigenous community, I initially was extremely averse to the idea of conducting ethnographic research, considering the long history of anthropological ethnography *about* Indigenous communities. Vine Deloria Jr. (1969) characterized anthropologists and their observations as relatively useless to Indigenous communities, stating, “The anthro is usually devoted to PURE RESEARCH. Pure research is a body of knowledge absolutely devoid of useful application and incapable of meaningful digestion” (p. 80). He continued, “...behind each policy and program with which Indians are plagued, if traced completely back to its origin, stands the anthropologist” (p. 81). Indeed, Deloria Jr.’s assertion that anthropological research intended to study cultures is generally not valuable or useful to Indigenous communities is not the only critique of methods that depend on observations, field notes, and being “immersed” in a community. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) further argues that historically, research in Indigenous communities has been premised on the notion that Indigenous peoples “were not considered agents themselves, as capable of or interested in research, or as having expert knowledge about themselves and their conditions” (p. x) and argues against the objectification and subjectification of Indigenous communities. These critiques, and the necessity to define an Indigenous research agenda as a non-Indigenous resident within Reservation boundaries hold a great deal of space in my thinking. Therefore, it has been critical throughout this process to focus my study on how individuals make complex meaning of their context, and how individuals navigate the colonial systems and processes, epistemic tensions, and policies that are expected to be enacted daily. It is in this way that my study more aligns to Critical Ethnography than the traditional form,

however I recognize that without clear values, guiding ethical principles, and intentional protocols, this delineation doesn't necessarily mean much.

In choosing a method that responded to historical and contemporary critiques of research within Indigenous communities as well as community values that stem from the geographic location within which I engaged for this study, I focused on four main questions as a lens for evaluating potential research methods. These questions were developed through a review of Indigenous research literature. They are:

1. Usefulness: How does this approach enhance possibilities of survival, regeneration, and resurgence? (Holmes & González, 2017, p. 216).
2. Ethics: Does this approach respect Indigenous sovereignty in regard to data, dissemination, story, and potential impact? Does this respect and adhere to traditional values systems and processes? (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016; Mohawk, 2004).
3. Mitakuye Oyasin: How does this approach honor the relationship of all human and non-human beings? How does this approach center the dignity of all human and non-human beings? (Salmon, 2000; Simpson, 2014; White Hat, 2012;).
4. Balance: What does this approach seek to create? What does this approach seek to destroy? (Seone, personal communication, 2019; Weber-Pillwax, 1999).

While engaging with these questions in regard to methods, I also asked them regarding the research question and intentions as well. My reflections are as follows:

### *Usefulness*

A primary concern for the design of this research was whether or not it would be considered useful in the research context. This required a lens that did not view

Indigenous communities as in need of some sort of “fixing,” and it also required an epistemic framework that recognized and respected the right to Indigenous control over the education of Indigenous children. When I initially proposed the idea of engaging in research to the local Tribal council, I was met with one Elder’s dismay at the idea. “We don’t need research. We know how to educate our children. We know what they need” (Black Bear, personal communication, 2021). The trepidation around research that is intended to “fix” Indigenous children and communities was and is a concern I deeply respect. With that in mind, it was important to me, in the design of this study, to ensure that I disrupted common approaches to research regarding Indigenous schooling. It is for this reason that I chose to focus the study on epistemologies, systems, and experiences rather than on what teachers and students are doing “wrong” in education. This lens allowed for a deep complexity of understanding that attempted to avoid surface-level fixes to education challenges and instead acknowledged the weaving together of ideas, epistemologies, and policy enactments that take place in schools and in spaces where decisions about schools are made every day. I view this research project as guided not towards telling anyone what children need or telling Indigenous peoples how to better educate their children, but towards a deep understanding that illuminates processes of governance that have long been informed by coloniality and resistances to it in schooling spaces. In this way, my hope was not only to forge a new understanding of how schools (dys)function, but also to encourage self-reflection among research participants, to engage with diverse stakeholders around policy-related issues that impact schooling, and to uncover the ways that policies advance and/or hinder practices of self-determination. In this sense, I truly believe the work to be useful in that it offers a new interpretation and

understanding of policy that could support continued resistance, aid in the interpretation and exertion of Tribal control over education as Tribes continue to battle with the State government, and encourage renewed approaches to teaching and learning that address a root policy problem at multiple levels, rather than address student and teacher behaviors in unsustainable and misguided ways.

### *Ethics*

In regard to data sovereignty including dissemination, story, and impact, it was important that my research adhered to an asset-based view of Indigenous teaching and learning, addressed community needs (Meyer, 2003), adhered to Tribal approval conditions, and took the utmost care to protect all involved parties. Furthermore, regarding ethics when considering my positionality as a white, non-Tribally enrolled community member, I also had to take care to ensure that my research did not further the colonization of Indigenous knowledge systems. This required an understanding of the historical positioning of Indigenous peoples in research, the power dynamics inherent in a researcher/researched relationship, and an ethical responsibility to develop a research project that acknowledged, affirmed, and empowered multiple ways of learning/knowing/seeing. Dunbar (2008) asserts:

That is, the sociocultural, political, and economic position of the researcher and the researched plays an acute role in how research is presented and therefore interpreted. In this instance, the researched is positioned or excluded from the mainstream or dominant culture. The researched is the object/ other/subject whose existence is described/ prescribed by members of the dominant culture model of knowing. They occupy a “liminal status/space” as people of color (Wynter, 1992,

as cited in Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). That is, there exists one “center” composed of those whose way of knowing determines how those outside the center are viewed. (p. 86)

This particular responsibility is a cause of some tension in the research design, as I recognized that the analysis of data and information would be a product of my own lens and positionality, which would always be grounded in my own epistemology and limitations. Addressing this challenge has been a primary driver in the research design, hence the shifting of my research question away from the historical view of research *about* Indigenous peoples and focusing rather on research about *policy enactments*. This required the inclusion of the voices, perspectives, and shared experiences of Tribal and non-Tribal education stakeholders.

The interpretation and dissemination of research was a further concern in regard to the ethics of this research design and topic. I recognized that the interpretation of data would be through my own lens. Cook (2008) argues, “...the interplay between participants’ experiences and the researcher’s interpretation of them needs to be carefully documented and justified” (p. 151) to move from broad storytelling into synthesis that made meaning of the intersection(s) of individual and collective experiences and broader social systems. This synthesis, while on one hand might seem to stray away from Indigenous perspectives on the importance of storytelling, falls more in line with my understandings of the *purpose* of Indigenous storytelling. Where I live, I have noticed that stories always serve a purpose, there is always an interpretation to be made and often a very explicit lesson. The interpretation may be up to the listener, however the lessons in traditional stories are often quite clear. Similarly, engaging in critical ethnographic

research positioned me as the listener of stories and an observer of social conditions, engaging in the process of interpretation given my own experiences and lenses. Using my own lens to interpret information was not inherently at odds with my present understandings of Lakota practices, however, as previously mentioned, for research to be ethical it must also be useful. This meant, to me, that the lessons learned needed be clearly articulated, but so must the process of coming to those conclusions.

### *Mitakuye Oyasin*

The third research design principle that guided the methodological considerations for this study was the notion of Mitakuye Oyasin. While I am not Indigenous and did not intend to co-opt Lakota values for this research, I have come to understand that there is an expectation for me as an outsider to embrace this notion in my work with Lakota students and families. This value, from my understanding, expresses the interrelatedness of all things and the necessity to treat all beings with dignity, respect, reciprocity, and a sense of kinship. In considering research questions and design, I was drawn to ethnography due to the depth of relationship and story that is inherent in the structure of this methodology. This practice additionally embraced the complexity with which individuals exist in relationship with one another and with their values alongside a particular context. Honoring relationships, to me, means honoring complexity, and ethnography holds a capacity to center these stories in a way that is unique from other approaches to research. Engaging in Critical Ethnography particularly, however, allowed for an analysis of relationships with policy and with social conditions to understand the story of Tribal Self-Determination and what it illuminated about the broader story of educational development for Indigenous students in the state.

### ***Balance***

The final design principle that I used to guide the development of my research questions and the selection of research practices was balance. I considered this research process to be focused on illuminating colonial ideology, but also on the creation of something new. It had to provide opportunities for co-generation alongside critique. It is this sense of balance that also enabled the project useful and responsive. The concept of balance, additionally, was liberating in that it pushed me to consider possibilities alongside problems. For this reason, my research question remained relatively open-ended, articulating only the idea that there is a relationship that exists between policy and enactment, but focused more on uncovering the story of that relationship. This allowed for generation, collaboration, and creation in the face of critique, disruption, and destruction. Furthermore, the process of engaging with ethnography honored this possibility as well. It allowed for a story to be told, in all its complexity. I also believe this research design decision allowed for collaboration, dialogue, and continued ideation in relationship with research participants.

### ***Locating Self***

To this point in this chapter, I have tried to be clear about my own tensions, anxieties, and the past missteps in research in Indigenous communities that I hoped to avoid in my own work. This reflexive practice was an important process to honor the lessons learned by those who have come before me and was also crucial to honoring the journeys, experiences, and wisdom of, particularly, Indigenous researchers. These perspectives, alongside the lessons that have been taught to me over the past eleven years in South Dakota, informed the design principles outlined in the previous section. This

practice of distilling and synthesizing broad understandings into my own interpretations of actionable guidance was (and is) a practice in utilizing knowledge that was gifted to me, whether through text, conversation, previous research, or simply living. As a next step, it was crucial to make an offering in return, and to similarly hold that offering not simply as words, but as a guide for action and process. This acknowledgement of what I offered the research process was my way of providing a grounding spiritual roadmap that centered my energy throughout the research process. It was, in essence, a positionality-based accountability mechanism. Earlier, I referenced the hesitance and push-back that took place in my initial meeting with the Tribal council education committee. After further reflection, I realized that the push-back may have partially stemmed from the fact that I did not offer anything in return for the time and energy of the council. I made no statement to clarify my commitments, my accountability to the community, nor my intentions. To move forward with the research process, it was crucial to define those commitments and be clear about them in the spaces that followed. The commitments and accountabilities were as follows:

This research was an expression of my appreciation for the complexity of human and more-than-human experience, guided by my love for creation. It was an extension of my understanding of my purpose: to co-create a world where all creation is honored.

This research was an expression of my appreciation for nuance that was informed by both my own critical lens, but also limited by my whiteness and proximity to colonial practices and structures. I have always noticed power dynamics and how they play out in overt and covert ways, and this research was intended to contribute that ability to a conversation on policy and educational practice.

This research was an expression of my profound respect for the autonomy and agency of individuals and of Tribal nations. While I have always believed that we are victims of a colonial state, I also centered my belief in our collective power to liberate ourselves from that state.

It is with these beliefs that I offered the following commitments as grounding for the research project:

1. I committed to listening, with love and intention, to the individuals who were willing to share with me and to honor their vulnerability in the process of synthesis and analysis.
2. I committed to articulating hard truths with humility and care.
3. I committed to centering what is possible, but also to naming what is problematic.
4. I committed to a process of analysis that was dedicated to unearthing linkages necessary for collective liberation and survival.
5. I committed to transparency, authenticity, and humility.
6. I committed to holding a vision for the future center, and to remind myself of that vision often, to allow it to evolve, and to ensure that it was always guided by love and care.
7. I committed to protecting future generations, to the best of my ability, with intention and integrity.

### ***Critical Ethnography***

In considering these guiding principles in research design, my own gifts and strengths, and the commitments that I made in light of them, as well as the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study, critical ethnography emerged as a research

tradition aligned to the goals and purposes of this work. Critical ethnography utilizes the data collection processes and procedures found in ethnographic research through a critical epistemological lens. Fitzpatrick and May (2022) describe critical ethnography as connecting traditional ethnographic practices with a political focus and reconceptualization to develop “a methodology that is personal, embodied, located, and lived, as well as unapologetically concentrated on relations of power” (p. 1). Fitzpatrick and May’s definition of critical ethnography as a methodology embraces the complexity that I was concerned with through the development of this study, and requires asking difficult questions about (in)equity while centering the relational nature of the researcher-participant dynamic. They state, “Critical ethnographic research, rather, takes time. It connects with the messy realities of people’s lives, and it engages directly, and in depth, with complex and often-contested educational contexts, communities, and challenges” (p. 8). The “critical” component of critical ethnography relates to critical social theory and has been described in several ways. Thomas (1993), for example, describes critical ethnography as requiring a component of advocacy on behalf of marginalized groups, while Carspecken and Apple (1992) characterize critical ethnographers as individuals who attempt to exercise their agency in using research to speak out against inequity, subjugation, and domination. I take issue with parts of these descriptions and the language of marginalization and domination in general, and I offer the critique that they position Indigenous peoples as passive recipients of colonial practices and identify the researcher as savior. The distinction between these definitions of critical ethnography and more contemporary approaches like that of Fitzpatrick and May (2022) and Howard and Ali (2016) lies in how they apply “critical” to critical ethnography. More recent scholars

have approached this methodology as a vehicle to understanding the dynamic and complex power structures that inform and maintain hegemonic social systems. They tend to argue that the research itself can give rise to collaborative action towards the transformation of society (Fitzpatrick & May, 2022; Howard & Ali, 2016; Wilson & Yull, 2016). These perspectives decenter the researcher and, rather, center the relationship between the researcher and participants including how meaning is made in the process of interacting with one another. Key tenets of Fitzpatrick and May's (2022, p. 16) definition of critical ethnography include:

- Orienting to power, in/justice, and in/equity
- (Social) theory and ontology
- Troubling the questions, being curious
- Relationalities, relationships, and reciprocity
- Positionality, reflection, reflexivity
- Time, “deep hanging out”
- An attempt to understand and communicate cultures, happenings, and their ethico-onto-epistemologies
- Writing, fieldwork, and other modes of production
- Change: wondering about change, creating change, troubling change, challenging inequities.

These tenets illuminated a clear alignment between the methodological approach of critical ethnography and my concern in this study with coloniality, its influence in the educational policy landscape of South Dakota, and the ways in which individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences within a hegemonic colonial system.

## Methods

As a summary of my methods, I have provided a table below that delineates the process, timelines, and participants, and other information. A more thorough description of each of the methods follows.

**Table 1**

*Methods Overview*

Component	Presencing	Visiting	Contextualizing
Purpose	Develop an understanding of the shared values, attitudes, and beliefs that are present in educational decision-making spaces and processes.	Discuss individual interpretations of self-determination to more deeply understand the values, attitudes, and beliefs that individuals hold in regards to their roles in education and education policy.	Examine how epistemic tensions regarding Indigenous education manifest in educational policy both today and historically.
Process/Tools	Observing (non-participant participant observations), participating, engaging	Semi-structured interviews; sharing one-on-one time and space; follow-up conversations	Document collection and analysis; review of policy documents and related literature.
Participants/ Spaces	Legislative session; Public Social Studies Standards hearings; daily working environments.	18 education stakeholders (teachers, parents, former students, non-profit leaders)	Policy documents and public records.
Timeline	January 2023-October 2023	January 2023-February 2024	January 2023-February 2024

Wolcott (2008) offers a frame for qualitative research data collection, which emphasizes Experiencing, Enquiring, and Examining as the three crucial components of the design. Experiencing, he posits, is not simply a catch-all phrase for participant observation. He argues that this practice involves information “that comes directly through all the senses” (p. 46). Fitzpatrick and May (2022) offer insight on ethnographic methods that emphasizes flexibility, practicality, and the relationships that exist and are formed between researcher and participants. They argue that methods must be thought of “as responses to the challenges and possibilities of doing ethnographic fieldwork and as particular ways to approach the interrogation of power-laden relationships” (p. 99). By merging these perspectives on ethnographic methods, I chose to engage in processes that prioritized relationships, allowed for contextualizing of the current (and historical) social context, and examined the dynamics of power present in Indian education policy in South Dakota.

According to Wolcott (2008), the main vehicle for experiencing is through participant observation, but it also includes field notes and memos that can attempt to capture nuance and subtlety according to the senses. In understanding these methods through the lens of relationships and context, “experiencing” becomes more about being present in a given moment in time, social location, or relationship. To be fully present in a moment, a researcher must be aware of what they are experiencing with their senses, but also metacognitive, zoomed-in to how they are thinking about what they are experiencing in a moment. Wolcott addresses this to an extent, identifying the need for the researcher to make decisions about passive observation or more active approaches. In this study, being present meant just that. Presence. While I participated in some public

forums, like the Social Studies Standards hearing and legislative sessions, I was also able to draw on the ways in which my work and life intersected with those of my participants. For example, one participant is a teacher whom I have coached and worked alongside for almost five years. Our work, even today, has us in close proximity to one another and I have been able to experience her teaching and learning over time and in different spaces. Another of my participants has been a colleague and dear friend for nearly eight years. We spend a great deal of time in our daily lives processing the current political context of the state, dreaming together, and sharing our work. My relationships with each of the participants I visited with is/was complex, which blurred the lines of “observation” and truly expanded my thinking around what it means to be present with participants as co-creators, colleagues, and friends. Our work was deeply intertwined with one another’s (and continues to be) in ways that made a traditionally academic form of “observing” impossible.

While I initially did try to isolate my “presencing” within the context of formal, public, government spaces, which was reminiscent more of typical “observing,” I also realized through the process that I am naturally present in spaces with my participants on an almost daily basis. This “presencing” part of the process, therefore, was highly subjective, sometimes documented in formal memos, but more frequently noticed in the daily work we carry out alongside one another. At times, it looked and felt like non-participant participant observation. At other times, it looked and felt more like going about my daily life and work. In fact, the study felt less like a formal research study and more like a natural extension of my care and commitment for young people in South Dakota. This, in my perspective, calls into question the ways in which deep relationality

did not seem to be a consistently present factor in the literature on research methods, except when described as a concern with “insider/outsider” status. As I engaged more and more with participants in a “presencing” context, I began to wonder: can research, in fact, be a deep expression of love, care, and commitment? In order for research to be useful, does it not have to come from a place of deep knowing about the issue at hand? Does it not need to come from a deeply-felt connection to what is at stake? Are there other ways to conceptualize the relationship between researcher and participant that deviate from how it is typically characterized as a delineated binary? And, what is possible when we move beyond the boundaries that academia places on research relationships?

It is important to note that, because of these relationships, the boundaries between doing formal research and simply going about my daily work with people I know and love felt blurred. It was nearly impossible to separate the daily work from the formal research process, but at the same time, I felt the need to focus my energy and analysis more on the “presencing” of public, less personal spaces in order to maintain some barrier between my personal spaces with trusted colleagues and formal research environments. It felt messy and precarious the entire time. That being said, it also felt important to lift up some of the brilliant work that I know is happening in Indigenous Education in South Dakota, much of which is being done by the participants in this study. The findings presented in later chapters will attempt to weave these different types of presencing together, in all their complexity.

Enquiring, according to Wolcott (2008), differs from experiencing in that the former focuses on “asking about what is going on” (p. 47) rather than observing what is going on. He makes this delineation clearer by emphasizing that experiencing often

involves being tuned-in to natural conversation and activity while enquiring often involves an intrusion or initiation of sorts. In response to the commitments and evaluative criteria explored earlier in this paper, I have refocused this component of ethnography on the concept of “visiting.” My take on enquiring addresses the tension that Wolcott names, where the researcher must decide between interrupting to guide the conversation or simply allowing it to continue with the “hope that what one wants to know may (eventually) be revealed in some naturally occurring way” (p. 47). In contrast to Wolcott, I do not perceive this to be a dilemma or tension. I perceive it to be an invitation to reject extractive interview practices in favor of being fully present with individuals, attuned to their needs, and to reciprocate in ways that validate, affirm, and show gratitude. In re-imagining the enquiring component of research design as “visiting,” I acknowledge that there was wisdom and offering present in the practice of dialogue and listening. What was uncovered was uncovered. It could not be directed, orchestrated, or contrived. It could only be received. This took on what adrienne maree brown (2021) refers to when she states, “There is a conversation in this room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.” (p. 14). Similarly, Madison (2005) refers to a similar approach, the dialogic performative, which is “charged by a desire for a generative and embodied reciprocity...a mutual creation of something different” (p. 320). “Visiting” did not preclude myself as the researcher from participation in the conversation, but rather required it, albeit in unique and situational ways. This practice required deep listening, intentional questioning, a desire to learn from the individual with whom I was sharing space, and reciprocity in the relationship. While the “visiting” component of this study might be most closely compared to semi-structured interviews, the “semi-structured”ness

of the conversations manifested in a meaningful dialogue, where both myself and the participants engaged, asked questions, and shared experiences. This, like in the “presencing” stage, made the dialogue very subjective. The follow-up conversations, which were optional for participants, were also semi-structured, however the focus of these conversations was more about member-checking and sharing research findings. In this phase of the “visiting” process, participants had the opportunity to retroactively choose a pseudonym, amend their statements, check the content for accuracy of their intentions, and to reflect on whether or not they felt represented in the findings.

Finally, Wolcott (2008) offers examining as a third element, “in which the researcher turns attention to what has been produced by others” (p. 47). This can include policies, documents, official statements, photographs, art, speech and music, and other elements of a “culture-sharing group.” Examining, as I understand it, is a process of understanding the broader social context that plays a role in what happens (presence) and how individuals talk about what happens (visiting). Because I believe “examination” to have a clinical approach, external in nature and detached from the senses, I have interpreted Wolcott’s framework to mean a process of “contextualizing.” In the contextualizing phase of understanding, I attempted to make meaning of the social conditions that surrounded conversations about schooling, specifically. Given this, I focused my contextual data on public policy documents, social media, and other non-formal vehicles that are used to talk about policy. This part of the process was more intended to paint a picture of the world that participants were navigating at the time of the study. It was important to develop a thorough understanding, through document and media analysis, of the public displays of both opposition and support for Indigenous

education issues. Additionally, this part of the process deepened my understanding of how individuals navigate policies by examining the attitudes, values, and beliefs that are espoused within the policies and other public media themselves. I will share more in-depth about each of these methods and how they were utilized later in this chapter.

## **Process**

### ***The beginning***

Upon passing the prospectus exam in March of 2022, I begin to work on submitting my research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as seeking approval from the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council. While my study was tentatively approved by the University of Minnesota's IRB process, final approval was contingent upon Tribal approval. I presented to the education committee at their regular meeting and, while members of the committee were supportive, they also articulated a need for a Tribal IRB process, which at the time only existed for research in the health sciences field. They requested that the development of a Tribal IRB process take place before they would officially approve my research proposal. In the late fall of 2022, after a large number of conversations between members of the committee and administrators at the Tribal College, a team of researchers and administrators from the Tribe developed the Higher Education Research Review Board (HERRB) housed at Sinte Gleska University. Their process required communication with the chair of the board, evidence of external school IRB approval, a series of written reflections and submissions, and then review by the HERB committee. I received approval from this committee on January 13, 2023, which finalized UMN IRB approval on January 23, 2023. It was at this point that I began

recruiting research participants, scheduling times to visit with individuals, attending important policy meetings, and analyzing documents relevant to the study.

### *Visiting*

As a reminder, my research question is: What is the relationship between Tribal Self-Determination policies and enactments, Tribal-serving schools, and Tribal and non-Tribal education stakeholders in South Dakota, and what does this dynamic illuminate about the story of educational development for Indigenous students in the state? As this question is centered on the *relationship* between policies and schools/stakeholders, and the term “relationship” signifies connection, this research needed to focus on uncovering the nature of the connections that are perceived and understood by individuals in the relationship. This included how individuals feel connected to policies, how they feel implicated in policies, and how they navigate their perceived roles in those implications. The role of visiting in this study was to serve as a primary source of information aimed at understanding the relationship between Self-Determination policies and enactments. Engaging in conversation with individuals who have a connection to Tribal education on the Rosebud Reservation was a vehicle to answer the following sub-questions to my overarching research question: 1.) How do people understand the role of policy and the state in Tribal education? And 2.) How do people think about and enact their own roles in relationship to policies and the state, specifically regarding identity, land relationships, and power (the three epistemic tensions outlined in Chapter Two)? This method, specifically, allowed me to hear the perspectives, opinions, hopes, and dreams of educators, students (18 years of age and older), parents, administrators, and community members. It also opened space for their critiques, frustrations, fears, and challenges.

Because policy enactment rests heavily on the shoulders of individuals and groups to interpret and act upon policies, these conversations were, perhaps, the most important component of the research design. They were also the most hopeful, the most exciting, and the most relational of the three methods I employed.

The initial conversations were semi-structured (see Appendix A: Interview Guide), which allowed me to have a scaffold for the conversation, but also the flexibility to follow the conversation wherever it led and to engage with the natural dialogue that occurred with individuals. While each initial conversation only lasted for an hour or so, the topic of Tribal education more broadly is a common concern in many of my social networks. In this sense, the dialogues were not relegated to the scheduled conversation in isolation, but also extended into “the field” of ethnographic research. Conversations were primarily virtual via Zoom (with only one in person), recorded (audio only), and later transcribed for analysis. While I had hoped to have this portion of the study completed by March 2022, the long process of developing the Tribal HERRB pushed the timeline back by almost a year. Even though it took much longer than anticipated, the extended duration of the process provided more opportunities to engage with the political landscape of South Dakota and the conversations, therefore, ended up aligning with some major policy shifts in South Dakota education. This provided for rich fodder, strong opinions, and clear critiques regarding a particular policy, which will be discussed later in this dissertation.

Upon beginning this part of the research process, I developed a questionnaire intended to garner interest in participating in the study. I had intended to post this survey on social media, contact individuals who completed it, and schedule interviews to

connect with as broad an audience as possible. The survey, however, wasn't a particularly relational process and I struggled to even distribute it because it felt so disconnected from the spirit of the study. I learned that, as I reached out to individuals within my education network (having been a resident of the area for nearly ten years and currently working in the broader state context of Indian Education, this is a wide and wonderful network of individuals), people were more than willing, even excited, to share their perspectives and support this research study. The more I talked about what I was interested in learning, the more people were willing to make time for a conversation, despite endlessly busy schedules and competing commitments. I had initially hoped to engage with ten or so people, but as the conversations began, I was reminded how exciting and special it is to connect with people. Ten conversations turned to fifteen, which turned to almost twenty. I never distributed the survey. The conversations frequently involved dialogue, back and forth conversations that focused on individual experiences, memories, pain points, and hope. They were laden with both laughter and, at times, tears. It is important to note that, because the folks I visited with were already in my community of educators, students, family members, mentors, and so forth, this study is limited in the scope of perspectives represented. While I was initially worried about this reality, I have since come to conclude that there are many spaces committed to hearing out the perspectives of the political and racial majority. The process of visiting in this study, on the contrary, was devoted to the voices and perspectives of former students, teachers, family members, Tribal leaders, and the people who have been fighting for education to be equitable for a long time. I am grateful that it turned out that way.

### *Presence-ing*

The purpose of “presence” in this study was to become immersed in the site of study to uncover more information about the policy context of South Dakota and how individuals organically enact policies and/or make meaning of them in public spaces. Practically, engaging in classroom and school-based observations became an unlikely endeavor, primarily due to timing (the bulk of my data collection happened during the summer of 2023 when schools were no longer in session), time available (I work a full time job and a part time job) and location (I had moved to a city approximately 3 hours away from the site of study in 2022 due to unforeseen circumstances). Ethnography, however, still “requires the researcher to gain deep, lived understandings of a context and to reflect on the meanings of cultures within that context” (Fitzpatrick & May, 2022, p.98). This characterization, though, feels troubling to me. As I engaged in the research process, I became very aware of the information I was privy to that could not possibly be replicated, even in the most well-designed of studies. I believe that lived understandings, when sought for the explicit purpose of research, will always have an element of being disconnected. An ethnographer entering a space as a researcher, for example, will not know what it feels like to grapple with the loss of a student to suicide and the deep impact that has on a community. They will not likely experience that loss as a *personal* loss. An ethnographer, no matter how critical, will not truly know what it is like to attend a graduation ceremony and feel the pride of watching former students complete their high school education, or the joy of knowing their resilience. On the other end, an ethnographer is not likely to notice or know the names of who is missing from the ceremony, nor feel the heartbreak that comes with that knowing. There is, therefore, a limit to the meaning that can be contrived in research that is carried out for the explicit

and sole purpose of research. When I moved to South Dakota in 2013, I did not do so for the purpose of data collection. I did not design this study for the purpose of “reflect[ing] on the meanings of cultures within that context,” (p. 98) as Fitzpatrick and May (2022) attest. The field, rather, was my daily life. Because of this, I felt the constant push and pull of navigating what I know to be true with what the academy recognizes as the “right” way(s) to generate knowledge. With ten years of lived experience in “the field,” I felt I had developed such deep understandings of the context of Indigenous Education in South Dakota, however for the purpose of this study, I still felt an obligation to a more formal observation process. The lack of clarity of what constituted “the field” for observations became a complicated factor, as I had contextual information and knowledge from informal and professional spaces over the past decade of living and working alongside the individuals with whom I visited, however much of this time was experienced prior to IRB and HERRB approval, and that which occurred post-approval was often in the context of my day-to-day life. I felt very aware of social and cultural interactions and social action, which are generally considered components of ethnography (Fitzpatrick & May, 2022), however it became difficult to compartmentalize between my life, my work, and “the field” of research. Fitzpatrick and May further state, “To *be* an ethnographer is to experience—in the body—the field/s that one is curious about; it is deeply relational, responsive, and emotional” (p. 97). The act of “presencing” was framed for me by the work I had been doing in Indigenous Education, my commitment to students and their families, and the deeply-felt joy, heartbreak, pain, and excitement of a complex context that initiated my desire to research in the first place. This reality had a strong impact on

my own subjectivity in the research process. I also, however, wanted to ensure I was following the guidelines for ethnographic study more explicitly.

Given all of these factors, I chose to utilize public meetings regarding the major policy shift referenced in the previous section, which was the large-scale, state-wide change in the South Dakota Social Studies standards. The context of this shift will be elaborated on more thoroughly in Chapter Five and has been touched upon in previous chapters. For the purpose of presence-ing for this study, I attended a public hearing of the South Dakota Board of Education Standards as the primary space to observe how individuals invested in education navigated the policy world. These standards were of particular concern for Indigenous Education advocates due to the process by which the state government had removed almost all references to Indigenous history and culture in the state (except when referencing warfare between Tribes or painting Tribes as poor, dependent entities rather than sovereign nations). This public hearing, therefore, provided an opportunity to hear from dozens of education stakeholders both in support of and in opposition to the new standards, which allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of how these individuals perceived the constraints upon their sovereignty and epistemic agency attempted through state policy. Throughout this hearing, I took field notes and paid particular attention to several components related to a decolonial approach to critical ethnography. They included: power dynamics (who made decisions, who informed those decisions, who received the decisions), the rationale for policy decisions and the reactions that were elicited, and how policies and priorities were framed, responded to, supported and/or resisted.

Certainly, more formal observations would have likely enriched this project in different ways, however, as previously stated, I also wanted to center specific voices and prioritize deep listening and visiting through one-on-one conversations as the primary method and needed to be practical regarding the time I had available, the time required, and general resources. Still, the observation of this particular space offered ample information, collected through field notes and a transcription of the recording of the meeting itself, to analyze and contribute to the overall story. The public hearing and resulting information served to answer the sub-question: “How do individuals organically navigate Self-Determination policies in relationship to Indigenous identity, land relationships, and power?” While the policy of the Social Studies standards was not necessarily a policy that directly referenced Tribal Self-Determination, it does fall within the policy era (discussed in Chapter One) of Tribal Self-Determination and had major implications for the enactment of s/Self-Determination, which will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five more thoroughly.

### ***Contextualizing***

The final method of information gathering and understanding was intended to answer the subquestion: “What are the tenets guiding policy in the state and how do stakeholders respond?” This subquestion was answerable through an analysis of documents including policies (for example, the Critical Race Theory (CRT) ban that preceded the development of the Social Studies standards), the Social Studies standards themselves, the public comment documents, and Tribal responses to those documents and policies. Such documents illuminate clear stated priorities, power relationships, and forms of refusal and resistance that took place through Tribal resolutions, alternate

curricula, school-based responses, etc. The documents and subsequent context that they create illuminated and defined the textual back-and-forth between policy and enactment that contributes to defining the relationship between the two. Furthermore, documents and other contextual information provided information on the second part of my research question: "...and what does this dynamic illuminate about the story of education development for Indigenous students in the state," by providing information on school-based responses and general curricula that were both reactive and proactive to the policy decisions of the state.

Documents related to policy served to contextualize the primary values, beliefs, and attitudes about learning, Tribal Self-Determination, and Indigenous Education held by multiple entities (state and Tribal) that were often in conflict with one another. In a colonial context, specifically, written documents hold power as a "paper trail" or authoritative documentation of legal obligations. Given this, they provided a great deal of information related to the expectations of the state and Tribes in regard to policy enactments and also represented power moves on the part of multiple parties. These artifacts represent a particular perspective at a particular moment in time and were useful in complicating the overall policy context of the state. They are mechanisms by which entities enact their own power in public, documented ways, therefore they were a crucial element of this study.

In many of my visiting interactions with participants, elements of documented context were organically referenced including but not limited to: the Social Studies standards, the Tribal resolution in response to the CRT ban, and the local public school district's response. While I did not ask participants to respond or react to these contextual

elements necessarily, it became clear that they were central components to how individuals were thinking about their work, their roles, and their understandings of Tribal s/Self-Determination.

Because the world of policy is vast and there were an infinite number of contextual documents and elements to analyze and bring into this research study, I utilized the documents referenced in visiting spaces as a primary jumping off point to determine what to analyze. Of course, this led to more and more documents and artifacts being brought into the research, however I believe this is part of what Fitzpatrick and May (2022) refer to when they state, “Methods then become leaping-off points for ethnographic doings...These may not be (and probably are not) all planned in advance because they will rely on the context of the research and the relationships (and relationalities) encountered therein” (p.99). I knew that contextualizing and analyzing the policy sphere would be an important method in this critical ethnography, however it was through the process of visiting with others that clarity around *which* context to include was illuminated.

### ***Analysis***

Meyer (2003) illuminates a pathway for analysis that moves a researcher from information to knowledge to understanding in a cyclical manner “with reflection and practice always unfolding upon itself” (p. 61). She also argues that “all knowledge is an interpretation” (p. 58). In the case of this study, meaning and interpretation through data analysis became interpretations of others’ interpretations of social conditions, policy, and place. The story of this information, knowledge, and understanding will be explored in Chapters Four and Five. The process of analysis to engage with these three layers of

meaning required engaging with transcripts from visiting sessions and the public hearing for the Social Studies standards, as well as with documents and artifacts which constituted the written/documented social context of the research problem, and with my own field notes.

The first step in my approach to data analysis required open coding and open memos. This process required “jotting down labels and making notes about them” (O’Reilly, 2012). These initial codes allowed me to apply intuition to the analysis of data, identifying phenomena and ideas and tracking my thinking about them. This process also allowed me to view the data more holistically and identify relationships between different conversations, social conditions, and political and epistemic tensions. Wilson (2008) states, “You have to use an intuitive logic, where you are looking at the whole thing at once and coming up with your answers through analysis that way” (p. 119). During this phase of analysis, I also coded for ideas related to the three main epistemic tensions outlined early in this dissertation. These included references to Indigenous power, Indigenous identity, and Indigenous land relationships in the context of education and education policy. The next step in my approach to data analysis involved becoming extremely proximate to the information and engaging in a more focused coding process of data, whether shared in visiting sessions, documented in a written artifact, or noted in my field observation notes. For recorded information, I began by transcribing the conversations utilizing an artificial intelligence program and then re-listening to the conversations and re-reading the transcripts to add notes on body language (which were captured during the interviews in memos), emphasis, and other non-verbal cues and to correct mistakes from the transcribing software. Some analysis occurred naturally during

conversations with participants and these shared interpretations and understandings were also documented in analytic memos throughout the process.

Because this research was focused on generating a critical ethnographic account that illuminated the relationships between epistemic tensions, action, and policy, I then engaged in an initial process of values coding of the data. “Values coding is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview (Saldaña, 2013, p. 110). This study focused particular attention on ideology and power as well as how those inform policy enactment. It was important, therefore, to identify a coding process that allowed for systems of values, ideologies, and core beliefs to be illuminated. Saldaña’s definitions for each of the components are as follows:

1. Value: the importance we attribute to oneself, another person, thing, or idea.
2. Attitude: the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, thing, or idea.
3. Belief: part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world (p. 110)

He furthermore identifies that values coding is of particular importance in studies that are concerned with issues of identity, values, intra and interpersonal experiences and, specifically, in critical ethnography. In this round of coding, codes were constructed during the process rather than a priori. After capturing codes in the transcripts themselves through a manual process, I began to combine codes (and subcodes) into similar categories via a spreadsheet. Throughout the process of values coding, I continued

the process of writing analytical memos. This reflexive process was focused more on documenting my own thinking, positionality, and frames of reference throughout the reading and analysis of the data. In this stage, I also paid close attention to and documented discrepancies between and among data sets and identified outliers to the categories that emerged.

Saldaña suggests that after the process of identifying codes, subcodes, and categories, researchers should move to “more general, higher-level, and more abstract constructs” (Richards and Morse, 2007 in Saldaña, 2013, p. 12). This process also required clarifying how the different themes and concepts were connected to one another through a decolonial lens. Because the intention of this research was not necessarily to generate a theory, but to develop a critical ethnographic account of the research context, these concepts became the anchors for the story that will unfold more thoroughly in Chapters Four and Five.

After drafting my findings, the connections and relationships between concepts, and beginning to develop the story of the research, I offered optional follow-up interviews to participants. I reached out to all individuals with whom I had visited to offer time to discuss what was emerging in the analysis and to offer opportunities for participants to provide feedback on the findings themselves. Additionally, only one of my research participants opted to use a pseudonym in the initial visiting process. While I deeply valued the openness and courage of individuals to speak candidly about their perspectives and experiences with the state and with education more broadly, I also wanted to provide an opportunity for them to opt into using a pseudonym after seeing how they were quoted and how their ideas were used in the context of the study. In this

sense, the process of member checking also became a way to address an ethical consideration and to ensure the protection of participants. These conversations were, similar to the first round of visiting, dialogical rather than unidirectional.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In working with Indigenous communities and education stakeholders, particularly as a white woman, there were a number of ethical concerns that both the Tribe and myself were concerned about. As previously stated, the history of research, particularly ethnographic research, in Indigenous communities, is fraught with tensions, misrepresentations, and ethical issues. Many of the more technical issues were addressed through secure data storage and member-checking through follow up conversations as well as through engaging in the formal Tribal approval process that was described earlier in this chapter. Free, prior, and informed consent took place with all individuals who engaged in the “visiting” phase of this study and individuals were informed initially, and in the member-checking process, that they could revoke consent or change their name as it appears in the findings at any time. In the storage and coding of data, I did not reference identifying characteristics of individuals. I stored all conversation transcripts, recordings, and consent forms separately from one another and developed a numerical process to de-identify stored data. Furthermore, to mitigate concern for confidentiality and job-related risk, all participants were given the opportunity to choose the location of the conversation (many chose to meet virtually and all chose to meet outside of regular working hours). In the dissemination of data, I will share the finalized dissertation document with the Tribal College (Sinte Gleska University) who provided HERRB approval for the study and requested access to the final report of findings as a condition

for approval. I will also engage with the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition to share the findings of the data upon graduation. The purpose of disseminating information to these groups is to ensure that local and grassroots organizations that are doing policy-related work have the first access to the study, rather than state policymakers who, historically, have used studies such as this one to “manage” or “fix” issues in Indigenous education. Rather, my hope is that this work can significantly contribute to the policy strategy of equity-focused groups and individuals.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study examined a local context of Indigenous education within a broader state-wide policy climate. The localized context is specific to a rural, Reservation community and, therefore, it is important to restate that this research should not be interpreted as representative of all Indigenous Education spaces and all Indigenous communities. This community is unique in its Tribal identity, but also in its history, language, protocols, and practices. While some of the findings may be applicable in other spaces, this study is in no way intended to be generalized as “the Native American experience” or anything of that nature. I did not have information from students who participate in schooling in other Reservation or urban spaces, which may be a consideration for future research. I worked only with (former) students, educators, administrators, and families and education stakeholders in one community. It is important to clarify, however, that at the state-level, when looking at both policy documents and interviewing individuals within Tribal Education and local non-profit contexts, there exists a broader range of schooling experiences including urban, rural, and Reservation. This does not mean that the research is generalizable to those spaces, however. Simply

put, many things happening at the state, Tribal, and non-profit policy levels in South Dakota impact students across the state, however my research was focused on one particular context.

An additional limitation is the reality that my proximity to the community with which I was working changed over the course of the study. I became geographically removed from the Reservation community where I had lived and worked in the years prior to engaging in this formal research, but I had become more proximate to state-level policy work through my shift in employment. I remained an adjunct faculty member at the Tribal College in the Reservation community, which allowed me to stay in contact with families and educators in the area, however I was more relationally distant than I had been previously when this study was initially designed.

The context of Covid-19 as a concern also limited this study. I explored some of the impacts of this in Chapter One, however, relative to the methods and data collection specifically, Covid-19 meant more virtual interviews and less opportunity to engage with folks in-person. While this also might have changed if I were geographically more proximate to the community, I also recognize that my own anxieties around Covid-19 and my fear of transmitting the virus to people I care about led to my own preference for virtual engagement.

### **Participant Characteristics and Introductions**

For this study, I visited with 17 individuals, each of whom was, to some degree, invested in local education on the Rosebud reservation. Many held multiple positions within local education. Eight were former students of schools on the Reservation, eight were current, past, or future parents of students who were or will be enrolled in local

schools, and seven were current or prior educators in one of the schools on the Reservation. Seven of the participants worked in or closely with Tribal programs like the Tribal Education Department or the local Tribal college and six of the participants worked in the education non-profit sector. Twelve participants identified as Indigenous or Native American, and six identified as non-Indigenous to the present-day United States. Of the non-Indigenous (to the US) participants, four identified as white and two identified as People of Color. In what follows below, I will provide a brief description of each of the research participants in the order in which I visited with them. The complexity of their experiences will be more thoroughly illuminated throughout the coming chapters; however these brief introductions are intended to provide an overview of their entry points into the ongoing dialogue about educational equity in South Dakota.

### *Josie*

I asked Josie to be my first research participant because she is one of my dearest friends. I knew she would provide feedback on how the process felt and how it could be improved because she is, at heart, a teacher. I first met Josie in 2014 when we both found ourselves teaching on the Rosebud Reservation, although we did not get to know each other well until we joined the staff of an educational nonprofit with a branch in South Dakota. She now works as the Executive Director of that same organization, although she does not think about the role in that way. Josie's perception of her work is centered on providing care and resources. This could mean to her staff, her former students, her community, her family, local schools, and the list goes on. She navigates her role with a sense of care and ethical responsibility, but also with a clear picture of coloniality as the culprit. She has always seemed to be able to naturally humanize people while holding

them accountable. Josie also holds a fierce critique of systems that means she often finds herself constantly advocating for changes to the nonprofit world in terms of how they characterize their work, how they act on their perceived vision, and how they measure impact in South Dakota.

### *Cheraye*

I taught Cheraye when she was in the fifth grade and again as a sixth grader. Now, as a grown woman who is pursuing her dreams of post-secondary education, her critique of the world around her is unrelenting and strong. Cheraye was like that as a kid, but watching her become more sure of herself, more angry about the state of the world, more frustrated by the inequity she knows to be true, and more active in the transformation of reality has been a true gift. She called me one day, infuriated about the state of homelessness and drug use on the Reservation, and asked questions about how to stay hopeful, how to know where to start, how to change things. In our conversation for this research, Cheraye shared openly about the frustrations and struggles she had with her public school education, but also about the joys and strengths of the district as well. She is a powerful balance of gentle and fierce.

### *Cassandra*

Cassandra was also a former student of mine, although I did not teach her until she was in the sixth grade. She was always an avid reader and star student. As the oldest of seven, Cassandra often has found herself in the role of looking out for her younger siblings, which is a trait she carries into a lot of spaces. She cares about the people around her and always strives to make sure everyone is happy, getting along, and feels like they are important. Like Cheraye, Cassandra is also pursuing higher education out of state and

working to chart her own path for her future. Her hopes often revolve around coming back to the Reservation to provide care for her people. Cassandra has a lot of fond memories of her middle school years, but less fondness for her high school experience.

### *Allen*

Allen is an educator. He teaches language and cultural classes while working to pursue a graduate degree in linguistics. He has held several different roles within both the public and Tribal districts, but loves to be in spaces where he is able to design programs and have far-reaching impact. Allen gets frustrated by the lack of language and cultural classes in the local schools, but uses his free time to attempt to offer solutions. For years, he offered a free Lakota language class online (and later in person). These classes were open to anyone and everyone who wanted to join and were focused on providing a low-stress, supportive environment for individuals to learn the language. His work is often limited by funding and other State/Federal forces, but Allen continues to develop and innovate to ensure a future where the Lakota language is thriving.

### *Carm*

I have known Carm since her very first day in the classroom. She moved to the Rosebud Reservation to teach after she finished school at a state university in South Dakota. Not far from where she was raised, Carm has worked in the public Reservation school as well as a private language and culture-focused school. Our paths have crossed in many ways over the years, and I have been able to observe her growth as an educator. Carm focuses a great deal of her energy on ensuring kids have access to high-quality educational experiences. Whether this means creating her own Lakota language tools,

partnering with other immersion and bilingual schools, building connections, taking on additional roles in the school, or something else, she is always putting students first.

### ***John***

John is a classroom teacher at one of the public schools on the Reservation. He moved to South Dakota with Teach for America several years ago. He is a quiet, serious, and focused educator who never misses an opportunity to critically self-reflect. I have always appreciated John's willingness to do things that might seem a little scary at first, like home visits to the families of his students. He has always been willing to try just about anything at least once, as long as there is logical reason to believe it will positively impact students. John also has a focused critique that allows him to see systems-level challenges and the way they play out in classrooms. He openly shares that critique, but is thoughtful and cautious about how he chooses to word it.

### ***Sarah***

Sarah is the founder of an educational non-profit based in Rapid City, South Dakota. I first met her when she was my manager at a different non-profit organization. My first day on the job was to support a march that she had organized in response to the state social studies standards revision that has been discussed in this paper. I would describe her as absolutely fearless and relentlessly critical in her work with the State government. She is always willing and able to name the contradictions she sees, but also to build relationships across lines of difference in ways that work to promote equitable access and opportunities for Indigenous students. She has held several different roles within Indigenous Education and holds a vast amount of knowledge and experience when

it comes to funding streams, the political sphere, and legal obligations that the State refuses to fulfill.

### *April*

I met April at the same time I met Josie, although we did not become better acquainted until many years later. April is a former educator, current nonprofit director, and auntie to several of the students who are impacted by the teachers she trains. She formerly worked as a head of school at a private school on Pine Ridge and now works to develop educators who will work on both Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations. April operates with a deep sense of justice and clarity on her perspectives on white supremacy, specifically. To visit with her means to share stories, ideas, and to often get ourselves worked up into one brilliant idea or another that we collaborate around until we take action on it and then move on to the next. Our conversations are always exciting, generative, and validating.

### *MaLeah*

MaLeah is yet another former student of mine. After giving birth to her son in her senior year of high school, MaLeah graduated and went on to pursue a career in nursing. She dreams of owning her own house to raise her son in and of sending him into a schooling environment where he will be treated with, and will treat others with, kindness. As a student, MaLeah would often seek out unique opportunities to extend her learning. She always had an appetite for growth and new knowledge. She also is an incredibly hard worker. Now, as a nursing student, she continues to work tirelessly to earn her degree, but she also deeply values the connections she makes with her peers and the learning that

happens in informal educational spaces. She wants to feel connected to others and part of a community in her learning.

### ***Kat***

Kat is another one of my dearest friends. She works primarily in youth engagement and development, for the same nonprofit as Josie and April. She has a strong ability to articulate her critique of colonization and has experience supporting students to do the same. As a former classroom teacher, Kat approached topics like the Keystone XL Pipeline with her students and supported them to take direct action. Their work earned them a spot at an international symposium. In her early years of teaching, Kat traveled internationally with a group of students so they could share their ideas with the world. Now, she focuses on building internal capacity for youth to imagine and enact their own futures. This has meant developing a mentorship program with one of the Reservation districts, providing training for students to engage at the social studies hearing and offer testimony, and other initiatives. Kat also is a fiercely loyal friend who is driven by a strong sense of equity and justice.

### ***Tate***

I have known Tate since my early years on the Reservation. She worked as a paraprofessional in one of the local public schools and then moved on to become a fully certified teacher at one of the Reservation's private schools. Her work is deeply relational and caring and she puts a premium on the relationships she builds with kids. In addition, though, Tate holds her students accountable. She believes they are capable of great things and expects them to get there. Tate also holds high expectations for other teachers. She gets frustrated by the mistreatment of anyone by anyone else and will always extend a

hand to help anyone for whatever purpose. She is one of the most genuinely caring people I have ever met and visiting with her for this process was a wonderful opportunity where she shared her thoughts on the relationship between State, or even Tribal, decisions and student impact. She is someone who always puts students first and truly treats every young person as if they were her relative.

### ***Dan***

Dan is an administrator at the Tribal college. He is also a former teacher and principal in Tribal schools on multiple Reservations. Dan has a gift for setting up systems that challenge the status quo of dominant education practices. He works tirelessly to connect staff to one another and to ensure clear and consistent communication across the college. He also likes to celebrate people. Dan has a gift for affirmations and for ensuring that people feel known and valued in their work and in their day-to-day lives. I used to live just down the road from Dan and his wife, Tara, and their young children. He would often deliver food on cold snowy days or if I was feeling sick, and if the water went out, Dan would be there to fix it. He always acts as if everyone around him is his neighbor, which means that he also always acts from a place of immense generosity.

### ***Tara***

Tara has worked for several nonprofit organizations in a number of capacities, but perhaps her biggest professional strength is creating space for people to dream, to articulate a new reality, and to create mechanisms by which to move toward that reality. When I lived near her several years ago, Tara would often visit me in the mornings or evenings for coffee, exercises, or to process tough things from the week or day. Tara also has a gift for making sure everyone around her feels valued and seen for their full,

authentic selves. When I was in my first year of teaching, Tara was the lead for teacher development for a nonprofit organization. She would occasionally visit my classroom to provide feedback, but more often than not would celebrate people. She holds high standards, but it is through her care that people feel compelled to live up to them. She is joyful, brilliant, focused, and has an immense capacity for complexity in how she considers the impacts of colonization on young people and communities.

### *Aimee*

Aimee is a department head at a local Tribal college. She took on this role after many decades of having a different department head in the position and was tasked with initiating changes in how the department operated. Her heart for teachers is clear and consistent, and she has dreams of a completely unique departure from the current state-defined model of teacher certification in South Dakota. She believes that teachers' capacity for their work is not always measurable by state assessments, like the Praxis test, but by their ability to connect with young people and to deliver on a high-quality education.

### *Nora*

Nora is the regional director for another educational nonprofit on Rosebud. This nonprofit is expressly focused on equity through building leadership capacity in individuals and communities. I have been organizing alongside Nora for almost a decade at this point and have been able to experience her vision and leadership firsthand. Nora approaches her work as an auntie, which sometimes means she is extremely gentle and sometimes it means she is incredibly direct and firm. Everything she does is out of love. Nora has been a steady supporter of my own work for as long as I have known her, but

she has also served as a source of guidance, inspiration, and care in my personal life as well.

### ***Jane***

Jane has worked in both government and the nonprofit sector on Rosebud. She is an energetic, brilliant, and compassionate person who is able to quickly see the ways that state actors' actions could play out against community priorities. She holds people accountable and takes a no-nonsense attitude when she is working. At the same time, however, she is gentle, funny, and deeply creative. Working with Jane in multiple spaces over the years has vastly extended my own understanding of the political roles and rights of Tribes as well as the history and policies surrounding the State's relationship with them.

### ***Judith***

I worked with Judith in her early days as a teacher, but she now works in the public policy field with the Tribe. As a non-Native to South Dakota, Judith believes in the importance of critical self-reflection and understanding positional power. She also believes in the importance of ensuring students receive an education that equips them to be thriving members of their communities, not just contributors to an economy. She prioritizes connection and care, but also holds a deep critique for the ways in which systems continue to perpetuate harm and the mechanisms by which they do so.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I sought to illuminate the methodological and positional considerations, commitments, and practices that I enacted in the process of engaging with this critical ethnographic study. I attempted to remain intentional in my decision-making

for the process and methods of the research, but also flexible and adaptable enough to respond to both community and individual needs. By engaging in this study, developing a more thorough understanding and description of how individuals engage with policies toward Indigenous self-determination, and working alongside community in dialogue, I sincerely believe that the co-creation of new pathways for and understandings of Indigenous education is possible.

## **Chapter Four: Findings, Part 1: Hegemony and Coloniality in Present**

### **Schooling Systems**

In this chapter, I will share the findings of the critical ethnographic exploration of s/Self-Determination in South Dakota in which I engaged for this research study. This study was designed to critically examine and understand the context and experiences of individuals within a landscape of policymaking that has been deeply informed by coloniality. Specifically, I have focused this study on different conceptualizations of s/Self-Determination and competing ideologies that can be found in policymaking and policy enactment across a range of spaces, policy levels, and individuals. My hope, ultimately, was to understand, interrogate, and complicate the relationship between Tribal Self-Determination policies and enactments, Tribal-serving schools, and Tribal and non-Tribal education stakeholders in South Dakota to develop an understanding of the implications for educational development for Indigenous students in South Dakota.

#### **Overview of the Study**

When I initially conceptualized this study, I had imagined that I would be examining the ways in which individuals navigate policy and enact it across lines of racial difference. As I engaged in visiting with participants, however, I became more enamored with the stories of resistance, refusal, and reclamation that continuously illuminated themselves. With this in mind, the ethnographic account shared below will focus largely on the ways in which individuals engage in practices of epistemic de-linking, thereby enacting decoloniality within the context of colonial policymaking and education practice. These themes, certainly, are not universal across all individuals who are invested in Tribal education on the Rosebud Reservation, which is largely the product

of the participant pool stemming from my professional network. There was already a certain degree of alignment in ideologies at the outset of our conversations. This meant that there were fewer distinctions between how individuals conceptualized self-determination and their roles in the policy enactment process, regardless of varied identity markers. In fact, many of the participants themselves held critiques and frustrations with the ways in which particular populations do and do not support a vision of educational sovereignty for students on Rosebud. While there was an opportunity to expand the participant base and ensure a more explicit analysis across lines of difference, I chose to lean into the stories and perspectives that were shared in the visiting process. There is a great deal of research dedicated to coloniality and colonization and how it shows up in schooling spaces (including much of what is included in the previous chapters of this dissertation). The participants, in general, were very tuned into the challenges and barriers facing Indigenous students in South Dakota and, specifically, on Rosebud. This analysis is important, and understanding the ways in which oppressive and hegemonic structures continue to function in educational spaces is a crucial component of dismantling them. What follows in this chapter, however, is intended to be devoted to the resisters. This is an ethnographic account of how individuals conceptualize and understand their own roles in the resistance of hegemony, how they take action, how they navigate political and epistemic tensions, and how they continue to hope despite the explicit and intentional efforts of colonial systems to eradicate individual and collective practices of self-determination.

The story that unfolds in what follows is organized across the major themes that were illuminated in the data analysis process. First and foremost, participants shared

several similar perspectives on the current state of education, particularly in reference to their experiences with government (people and policies), and schools. These perspectives frame up a shared experience of the context of Indigenous education in South Dakota, specifically as it pertains to students on Rosebud. In the first chapters of this dissertation, I examined the historical context of Indigenous Education in the United States and the historical and contemporary issues related to this in South Dakota. Then, I explored the ways in which Indigenous scholars have responded to the dominant political discourses held by the United States government as they concern Indigenous peoples of this country. The findings shared in this chapter will expand on that work in order to contextualize the ways in which individuals “on the ground” experience these tensions and discourses and how they are playing out in very real ways every day.

The findings shared in the subsequent chapter will explore the ways in which participants navigate these tensions through their own epistemic de-linking and epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009). As Cusicanqui (2012) states, “The possibility of a profound cultural reform in our society depends on the decolonization of our gestures and acts and the language with which we name the world” (pp. 105-106). In this sense, participants engaged in reclaiming, reimagining, and renaming the world in several ways regarding Indigenous Education and their perceived roles within it. Sometimes these were informed by actual schooling experiences and sometimes by a vision for education that is rooted in decoloniality. Simultaneously, they engaged in epistemic and literal refusals, which at times were complicated by deep anxieties regarding asymmetrical power relations. In other words, many participants were acutely aware of the potential risks involved in their refusals and navigated these in different ways. Several themes emerged

in how participants both conceptualized and articulated their de-linking. These were: a.) Education as relational, b.) Education as resistance, and c.) Education as sustenance. Each frame included unique, but connected, ideas about the roles of educators and schools, the roles of government and policy, and understandings of sovereignty and self-determination. Participants utilized these epistemic frames to re-define education, to imagine the world through a decolonial lens, and to inform their actions in their respective roles as formal and informal educators.

Note: the following ethnographic account is my interpretation of a series of events and perspectives intended to understand how a group of individuals experience the policy climate of South Dakota. Their experiences, and my interpretations of them, are subjective.

### **“Well, no wonder our state’s in a shit shambles”: Shared Experiences on the Current State of Indigenous Education**

Toward the end of the social studies standards hearing in April of 2023, the committee turned the microphone over to Joseph Graves, secretary of education for the state of South Dakota. I had been sitting in the hearing with my dear friend Josie and her family for several hours at that point. The day was filled with enraging testimonies from folks like the blatant anti-Indigenous missionary to Dr. Ben Jones, the state historian, who argued that the standards, the design of which was facilitated by William Morrisey of Hillsdale College for a hefty price tag of \$200,000 (Stephens, 2023), were good for students. The standards were terrible. They were poorly written and oddly structured in ways that do not support student thinking nor brain development. The proponent testimonies from both the individuals in the room and the just-over-100 public comments

submitted emphasized the necessity for students to learn the content presented in the standards and several proponents even went so far as to imply that anyone opposing the standards did not believe South Dakota students are capable of learning.

When Secretary Graves took the floor at about the four-hour mark, he brought with him portraits of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. Dr. Sherry Johnson of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate asked for a point of order, stating that the opponents were not permitted to bring props with them for testimony. The point of order was respected, and the portraits were removed to the applause of the crowd. He began his rebuttal to the opponents:

Board members, these two items were offered up...because you're first of all very familiar with those two paintings...the first was Washington of the founders. First among equals. Victorious general over the world's colonial superpower, chairman of the constitutional convention, not just first president but first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen. The second painting was Lincoln. Honest Abe...not the creator of our nation, that was Washington, but its savior.

(Board of Educational Standards Hearing, 2023, 4:03:46)

Graves proceeded to characterize the ubiquity of these portraits in every classroom of the past as formative and indicative of the very identity of a space as a classroom. The rationale for the prominence of these portraits in previous years, he claimed, was because “children need heroes” (Board of Educational Standards Hearing, 2023, 4:05:31). As he argued in favor of the greatness of these overrepresented white men, many of us in the room turned to each other in disbelief. Was it possible that the secretary of education was unaware of just how problematic these two presidents were for Indigenous communities?

Washington, while he initiated the process of treaties with Indigenous nations, also viewed Native peoples as “savages” and relentlessly pursued Indigenous land (Brockell, 2019). Lincoln stood at the helm of the largest mass execution in United States history; that of 38 Dakota men in the wake of the Dakota War of 1862. The men who were sentenced were largely given unfair, extremely brief trials. Individuals who were pardoned from the execution were imprisoned or, in the case of women, children, and Elders, sent to Pike Island, Minnesota where many died of disease. His administration banned the Dakota from living in Minnesota. That law still stands today (University of Minnesota, 2024).

I wanted to be shocked at Graves’ blatant display of what I understood to be disregard for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous history. But it just was not that surprising. It felt like simply another message on the state’s stance on Indigenous education as less important, or even as non-existent. In a later conversation, Jane shared with me about a previous encounter with the Secretary at a summit to discuss student achievement, state policies and metrics.

Secretary Graves somehow shows up in our room. And I was, so I was speaking, I turned and looked and I was like, totally different. There's like... I have other sessions, go to one of those sessions. Anyway, I made a comment about Native students and like, like this is not ok because we have historical, historically, we have, you know, 50% graduation rates. Now, I understand why it doesn't change. And the department needs to do something about changing...that policy can be changed. It is not set in stone. But he was sitting right next to me and I was like,

oh, wonderful. So then I just quit talking and, pretty soon he was asleep (Jane, personal communication, October 24, 2023).

Jane has been working in education for many years. Her work has spanned the government and nonprofit sectors, and she exudes a brilliance and vision for this work that is rooted in a fierce love for her community. I was not in the space she was describing, which took place at a local school, but I could picture it. I could feel the cold, hard plastic of the desks, sense the chilliness of the air, smell the sterility of post-covid classrooms, and perhaps most vividly, I could imagine the general apathy and lack of surprise in the room as Jane's words went unheard and unheeded. Despite (or perhaps because of) her brilliance and tenacity, she is often at the forefront of battles for educational equity. She seems unfatigued, but I also know it takes a toll on her to have to fight the same fight over and over again. She does not necessarily feel forced into silence, as the above quote might suggest. Rather, she is strategic about when to spend her energy with certain stakeholders and when to save it for other spaces. This is an example of the latter. There might be a world where State officials enter into dialogue with Tribes willingly and with curiosity, but that world is likely in a distant future. Instead, people like Jane must continually navigate openly hostile and apathetic spaces. Her work, while remaining focused on student impact, has required an ability to quickly make decisions about how to respond to officials in the moment. Say too much and they might become even more openly hostile. Say too little and nothing gets done. As we were visiting, her voice was filled with tongue-in-cheek laughter. It seemed so absurd and yet so predictable that a state official would fall asleep (or even be so disinterested that it seemed like he fell asleep) in a meeting about the future of Indigenous students. Her

frustration with the state education department was echoed by several other participants, illuminating that there is little reason for participants to believe that South Dakota state officials are even *pretending* to be invested in Indigenous Education. The blatant disregard for Indigenous youth by our highest-ranking education decisionmakers is nauseating, at best. Of course, in that moment, all we could do was laugh at the absurdity and continue on. That is something I had been able to see Jane demonstrate multiple times. While frustrated by how the state treats the young people she cares about, she has continually demonstrated a resilience that is characteristic primarily of her deep love for her community.

#### **“It feels like a big ol’ game”:** Policymakers and Policies

There was a relatively shared experience among research participants in terms of education and the people who make policies about it at the state (and sometimes, district) level: that they make things more difficult. In many cases, this was experienced as an intentional effort, not just a passive remnant of colonization. Rather, the stance of state officials towards Indigenous Education was understood as an active and, mostly, conscious choice to perpetuate coloniality. One participant, John, who was a classroom teacher on the Reservation, reflected upon the instance described above with Secretary Graves and the portraits. He stated,

I read about it in the news. It's there, it's official, it's real and it's something people take notice of is, one, quite tone deaf to all the, for all the Native kids and educators in South Dakota. And for me reveals some of the purposes of the standards, which is to make those people into heroes for kids, which I think is related to a broader push for patriotism. And *I* do not use that word. The strict

definition put in the standards could lead them to have a particular view of

America in the world of American history and of opinions and politics that might point out more of the problems...(John, personal communication, May 25, 2023).

John, like many participants, was acutely aware of the ways in which he felt that state policymakers attempt to reproduce asymmetrical power relations through a rhetoric of patriotism and cultivating a particular view of America. As a Social Studies teacher, John was particularly concerned with the new standards. His analysis in this quote and the broader conversation around the standards signified that he sensed an intention of indoctrination into a patriotic view of America as one of the likely outcomes of this new policy. Even though the standards document (2023) explicitly states that children deserve “Honest, balanced, and complete accounts of historical events and debates that foster a love of country that, like any love, is not blind to faults” (p. 2), the sense that something more sinister is at play in the dissemination of state documents was a clear and common experience amongst educators with whom I spoke. April, who works for an education nonprofit that trains and develops early career educators, reflected on this as well. April’s orientation to her work has had a strong, overtly stated purpose of the pursuit of equity for Indigenous students. She has always been one of my favorite people to ideate with. Her approach to her work has been rooted in deep commitment to young people. She started her teaching career in South Dakota and has remained here to work in ways that impact Indigenous youth across the country. April’s Indigeneity guides her work, her connections with her students, and her orientation to equity. She has never been shy about her critique of systems, which is one of her biggest and most appreciated strengths. She stated, “I also do think that there's like a level of like wanted ignorance...and I, I think

like that ignorance is just like, we can't see a world where tribes educate their own students. So despite the examples of other states and other countries, they are just forcibly being ignorant towards that. And I think as by ignorance is where it's like, well, we just like, can't see this working" (April, personal communication, July 19, 2023). What April was describing in this critique is a world in which decisionmakers refuse to acknowledge the data, the precedents that have been set, and the reality of what has been proven possible in Indigenous education in other states and countries. Rather, in South Dakota, there seems to be a desire to look the other way and deny that Indigenous youth are worthy of the care, concern, and intentionality shown to other students. This sentiment echoes what Jane shared earlier. In other conversations, the notion that the state is actively working against Indigenous interests, particularly in regard to education, was reiterated. Kat, who works in youth development for a South Dakota-based nonprofit, shared, "I, I would go so far as to say that the state is the modern manifestation of colonization" (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023). In South Dakota, this has created a dynamic whereby state officials are viewed as something that youth need to be protected from, as their actions are not simply made up of ideological violence, but of active attempts at "harming and doing violence towards Native youth as a means to end Native youth, peoples, and claims to land" (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023). When asked what, specifically, young people need to be protected from, Tara stated,

racism, heteronormative normativity, capitalism, like protecting from some of those the, the very real, very real and violent in a lot of ways, ideas and structures and systems that tend to disconnect them from themselves...if we can protect

them from [Governor] Kristi's executive order, specifically. (Tara, personal communication, October 5, 2023)

As Tara was sharing this, I reflected on the ways in which, at times, protecting students *from* the State has also involved equipping them to exercise their autonomy *against* it. In the case of the social studies standards, both Kat and Sarah provided training for students to prepare them for providing public testimony on the potential impacts of the standards. At the hearing, when one student got up to speak and share their testimony, the others that traveled with him got up from their seats and repositioned themselves in a row of chairs immediately behind their peer and directly across from the board. This was a show of power and strength that, while not necessarily explicitly taught, demonstrated young peoples' capacity to know when they are being treated unfairly by their government. I watched in awe as multiple students shared their perspectives in a room filled with hundreds of people, some of whom were even in active, vocal denial of their very right to exist in the first place. Sometimes, like in this example, protecting students from the state means holding space for them to develop their critiques and supporting them in developing the skills necessary to engage in hegemonic spaces.

Still, however, according to participants, state officials utilize several key tactics in their approach to attempting to de-legitimize Indigenous Education and even cause harm to Indigenous youth. These included: a.) exclusionary practices (like Gatekeeping and simply not acknowledging the legitimacy of Indigenous voices), b.) instilling a sense of fear or uncertainty, and c.) protecting their own individual self-interests. These tactics

represent the vehicles by which state forces attempt to assert hegemonic control and perpetuate coloniality in educational decision-making.

### *Policymakers and Exclusionary Practices*

Gatekeeping, or the control of access to resources, was often described in conversation with participants as a process by which government officials have acted to maintain a particular social hierarchy through policymaking. When I was visiting with Josie, this was a major topic of discussion. She shared, “The first thing that comes to mind...is like gatekeeping and particularly like hurting, like, keeping people in their proper place by enacting certain policies” (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023). When asked for specific examples, she continued

Teacher certification and its need to exist primarily, it seems, for a control of quality that is defined by someone outside of this community, like the state. If you can control certification, you can control what and who teaches kids...Some kind of game is what it often feels like. And when politics in this way have overhead over a large group of people and funds and decisions, it just feels like a scramble for control and loss of control and then getting creative about how to regain control (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023)

In Josie’s work, she and her team are largely tasked with preparing educators for full certification. When I worked with her, this was often a complicated task, with rules that changed on a regular basis, and with guidelines that were primarily defined by the state. When individuals pursue an alternative certification pathway, they often are required to take several courses to move from alternatively certified to full professional certification. While this is not inherently a “bad” thing, there has long been wide variety

in the perspectives that teachers receive in this coursework. For example, all teachers are required to take a South Dakota Indian Studies course in South Dakota. On the surface, this seems like a positive step forward. However, in practice, there is little evidence that this coursework actually equips teachers with knowledge of Indigenous perspectives in the state. For example, as of 2021, only 27% of South Dakota teachers agreed that they assessed students' understandings of Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and only 30% of administrators reported utilizing accountability measures for these same standards with teachers (Mercer, 2021). While Josie and her team work to ensure teachers are utilizing the knowledge inherent in the standards and, additionally, that their teachers are building understanding of the communities within which they work, this is not universal. I can recall conversations with multiple teachers in my work with Josie where teachers even questioned whether they should be teaching the standards in the first place. Uncertainty about roles and educational purposes seems to be a byproduct of the quest for control about which Josie spoke. When the State passes a policy, but there is little accountability for how that policy is enacted, individuals are left to their own interpretations which, unfortunately, tend to center socialized biases and the inherent racism that plagues South Dakota. In other instances, this "control of quality" meant testing requirements that did not necessarily assess an individual's capacity for teaching a particular grade or content area, nor for community-defined values and priorities. Aimee shared

Why are we holding them up if they can't do linear algebra at an eighth-grade level? So, I think we need to do some things with where we set up our endorsement areas. I think we need to do some praxis, test changes or get rid of

them entirely. But yet that being said, I'm in a spot right now. I have a teacher candidate who is not capable of passing the Praxis<sup>1</sup> at all. She is a sweetheart. She'd be great in a preschool setting. We don't offer that early childhood bachelor's degree. And so the idea that she has to pass the Praxis before she can get into student teaching and before she can be done with her program, it, that's really, really hard. And so I really think we are denying some really great people an opportunity in some ways (Aimee, personal communication, October 18, 2023).

Aimee, who is an administrator and educator, often thinks about the ways to make education more community responsive. In our work together, she has supported the redesign of an entire master's degree program to ensure alignment with community priorities. Still, however, she feels frustrated by the barriers created for students to become educators and believes that there should be more of an effort to identify different measures of success for pre-service teachers. In one faculty meeting we attended together, I remember her naming this explicitly. While there was general agreement in the space, there is also a clear barrier to even knowing where to start with changing the process. The Praxis has been in place as a requirement for a long time and it is likely that any attempt to push against it would be misconstrued as an attempt to lower standards. This implies that the only standards that matter are the ones set by the State and furthers the paternalistic relationship that the State attempts to maintain with Tribes. Underlying

---

<sup>1</sup> The Praxis is a teacher assessment administered by the ETS and required by the State of South Dakota for certification. The series consists of tests that assess a teacher's core academic skills, content knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge.

this is a core belief that Tribes are not capable of defining what is best for their own children.

Control over who gets certified and who is considered qualified to teach kids in South Dakota was also experienced by some participants as a process of making it incredibly challenging to get certified and simultaneously enacting standards that conflicted with left-wing ideological values to push people out of the profession. For example, issues with the electronic certification platform seemed to coincide with the passage and rollout of the new social studies standards. This implied to some educators that there was a malicious intent regarding control of content. While the social studies standards were being debated and voted upon, teachers were experiencing months-long delays in their recertification processes, including a complete shutdown of the online certification system.

Yeah, like there's a, sense I felt a lot and seen expressed by other teachers with the certification stuff also with actions by the district or occasionally the school is: being a teacher is hard enough, it is clearly hard enough to get teachers out here. So why are they taking action that seems to just make it harder to be a teacher with little to no discernible benefit to anybody else?... We speculated that maybe driving social studies teachers out is part of the plan that at least the conscientious social studies teachers who do not want to do that, who would view it as a violation of their professional ethics or an insult to their career and professionalism and have the option to move (John, personal communication, May 25, 2023).

Exclusion was also experienced (and/or noticed) by some participants in the state's lack of acknowledgement of Indigenous voices, perspectives, and priorities. Indigenous educators from across the state, for example, applied to be part of the social studies standards revision committee. I, myself, was one of them. Many of us were denied participation in the group. While Noem argued that there was significant Indigenous voice inclusion in the standards revision process, Indigenous peoples across the state were dissatisfied with her characterization of inclusion, often feeling that the committee was still politically "stacked," regardless of who was included in the space (Jackson, 2022). For current classroom educators who applied to be on the committee, the rejection of the opportunity to participate was hurtful and sometimes connected to their own understandings of racial bias in the state. Tate and I reflected on this together, as she also applied to be on the committee.

And then it was just a shitty ass email. Sorry, you weren't selected, try again next time or something like that. And I was just like, I feel like I just applied to be on the Price is Right. You know, like the way they responded and I'm just like, well, no wonder our state's in a shit shambles. Look at the way they respond to teachers. And then part of me was like, was it because I was so honest in the application process? You know what I mean? Like, should I have not said where I was from? Should I have not? (Tate, personal communication, September 8, 2023).

Lastly, exclusion from government officials was frequently experienced by many participants as the active process by which policymakers devalued Indigenous education in the state. I had seen this play out in many ways as I worked alongside Sarah. At one

point, we attended a legislative session meeting with the Senate State Affairs Committee. Our goal was to challenge the fact that the Governor had signed an executive order to remove the Office of Indian Education from the Department of Education and place it under the arm of the Tribal Relations office. We showed up to the meeting with what I thought was a solid argument: that this move limited the opportunities for Indigenous students in the state who were living off Reservation or who were not enrolled members of South Dakota Tribes, while simultaneously removing the responsibilities of schools that serve primarily non-Indigenous populations to teach the about the Indigenous history and culture in the State. The bill seemed doomed from the start. I think we both knew that before going in, but the space felt equally as hostile as the Education Committee spaces we had participated in. As Dave Flute, Tribal Affairs Secretary, took to the microphone, he reiterated that the “experts” (which he said twice, with notable emphasis) on Tribal affairs should be tasked with this particular work. He made no mention of the experts on Indigenous Education, like Sarah, who may be better positioned to speak to the needs of Indigenous students. The Secretary of Education also opposed the move and argued that the location of the office does not preclude anyone from reaching out to the department regarding Indigenous Education. The tone of the meeting was highly condescending as Senator Schoenbeck talked about how much he likes Dave Flute and that we, as proponents of the bill, were simply “throwing rocks.” He characterized us as petulant, argumentative children who clearly did not understand the inner workings of the legislature. Troy Heinert, Senator from the Reservation, pushed back, but the bill was moved to the 41st day, nonetheless (Senate State Affairs Committee Hearing, February 9,

2022). While we left disheartened, we did not leave surprised. In our conversation more than a year later, Sarah shared

Yeah, I think because the schools are governed in, in collaboration between Tribes and BIE [Bureau of Indian Education] that they're perceived as a federally or Tribally controlled schools and therefore out of the jurisdiction of the South Dakota Department of Education, which is ironic because the South Dakota Department of Ed should be ensuring great educational outcomes for every student in our state regardless of where they're at. I think also it's interesting because there's this total evasion of responsibility...I would love to say that if, if Indian Ed were still in the DOE [Department of Education] that we would, we wouldn't, we wouldn't be in the predicament that we're in with Indian Ed. But that's not true either. I feel like unfortunately, there's just never been a place for Indian Ed in our state (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

As illuminated in the above excerpt, the state of South Dakota often is perceived as not prioritizing Indigenous Education. In recent years, this has taken the form of a complete disconnect between the Department of Education, Tribal Relations, and the Tribal Education Directors (TEDs) of each Tribal nation. TEDs hold the responsibility of directing education in their respective communities, however the formal relationship with the Department of Education has been felt to not have been taken seriously. In regard to the same issue of the location of the Office of Indian Education, in a recent address to the South Dakota legislature, the secretary of the Tribal Relations department deflected questions regarding the academic success of Indigenous students by arguing that measuring things like Indigenous students' high school completion rates and other

metrics were not part of the responsibility of the department nor of the Office of Indian Education. Their role, he argued, is to ensure the broad understanding of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings. When pressed further, he argued that Tribes themselves should be held responsible for students' academic success (South Dakota Joint Committee on Appropriations, January 17, 2024). TEDs, however, often experience a lack of support from the Department of Education and a lack of commitment to Tribal issues. One example of this is perceived lack of interest from the Secretary of Education, the Director of the Office of Indian Education, and the Director of Tribal Relations in building a healthy and effective working relationship with TEDs. Even when pressed, these government officials could not clarify the nature of the working relationship nor their rationale for choosing to devalue the relationship with the TEDs. Jane reflected on a particular legislative committee meeting where this issue was raised:

But like in that space, when you think about the relationship between Tribes, and the state, the Secretary of Education should be in that meeting just the way that Tony Dearman, who is the director of BIE for the federal government, comes to the meeting. Right? So, and so this was the questioning to Tribal Relations. Why are they not here? Why are they not building the relationship? So, anyway, when Fred [Osborn] and Secretary Graves got in front of the committee, they just point blank, asked them. Well, you heard each of the directors ask this question. What's your response? Secretary Graves? He's, he looked right at Fred. I, I was like, oh my God, this is hilarious. All right, secretary, no response. And he let Fred fumble through, fumble through that answer and did not give an answer (Jane, personal communication, October 24, 2023).

### *Policymakers as Cultivators of Fear and Uncertainty*

In addition to exercising exclusionary practices, another way that State policymakers have acted in accordance with coloniality, according to participant experiences, was through attempting to instill fear and uncertainty in individuals across the policy enactment spectrum. Often, this fearmongering was understood to be aimed at teachers most consistently, whether through policy or via implied threats. Dan shared

Kristi Noem, and the policies in South Dakota are using threatening language to a teacher that, that teachers that if you promote certain world views or you, you promote certain ideologies in your classroom where you talk about certain things, certain values or certain, whatever that, is threatening, threatening to a teacher that you could lose licensure. It's vague but it's threatening (Dan, personal communication, September 28, 2023).

Some teachers operated with a belief that the state might “take punitive action” (John, personal communication, May 25, 2023) and others articulated the reality that one of the consequences of noncompliance with policy was, in some cases, withholding of resources. Sarah shared

And that's why we are in the state that we're in today. And unfortunately, the status quo likes to put us in a box. And I'm talking to any sector, like the status quo of any sector or institution places everyone, individuals in a box. And if you don't fit that box, then you're often under or not resourced to do the things that you would like to do (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

Yet another vehicle by which the state is understood to attempt to instill fear in the general population of the state is through manipulating a narrative about Indigenous peoples and using it to sow division and mistrust.

All of these very pervasive and awful beliefs and core beliefs that are the source of all of this like animosity and the lack of understanding, right at the end of the day, is having a very warped perspective on history on treaty rights, on like social practices and a deep lack of empathy. And that is what the state is fostering by removing exposure of all these other, like all these other kids, all of these other South Dakotans that have never stepped a foot in a reservation, right? I wonder to what extent this goes beyond just social studies and like even education, even though education is like the root of everything, right? Like education is the greatest...I'm gonna say it's a great catalyst for change. So, by controlling the population outside of the reservations, you are setting the bar for what the system looks like and you're perpetuating the isolation of all of those groups that you are hostile towards to start with. (Judith, personal communication, November 16, 2023).

The notion of state-induced fearmongering was expressed as extending beyond a top-down approach, wherein the state orchestrated scare tactics. Individuals on the policy enactment spectrum also navigated these tactics in their own ways. At times, these individuals were willing to assume risk and tended to not take state threats seriously. In other instances, however, these approaches to control seemed to work quite effectively. In the recent case of the social studies standards, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe issued a resolution that informed educators across the Reservation of their intent to support and

protect any educator who approached the teaching of “divisive concepts” as outlined in Noem’s 2021 Executive Order and subsequent 2022 Executive Order, which utilized partisan language to make false implications about the nature of Critical Race Theory and create a sense of alarm regarding what was being taught in schools (Executive Order 2021-11, 2021; Executive Order 2022-2, 2022). As I met with several individuals over several meetings to draft this resolution, it became clear that the Tribe was intent on ensuring that there was some sort of buffer between the State and the teachers of Indigenous students. There was some anxiety that teachers would be dissuaded from tackling uncomfortable topics, an issue that already seemed present in the schools at the time. There was also some anxiety about the possibility of this executive order reinforcing biases that were (and are) frequently held against Indigenous students by their teachers. As we were working on this response, more and more bills emerged that seemed to be aimed at controlling the content and teaching practices that could support Indigenous students in developing their critiques of the world around them, the oppression that they face, and the role of the state in perpetuating that oppression. Such bills were brought through the legislature to condemn particular teaching practices in order to “protect parents’ rights.” These bills (in South Dakota and across the country) were frequently right-wing political approaches to brew distrust of teachers and schools. Some bills required educators to post their curriculum and plans online. The implications here were that teachers were “indoctrinating” and “grooming” young people—two phrases that had been very prevalent in South Dakota (and national) lawmaking in the years preceding and following Noem’s executive order (Matzen, 2022; Pfankuch, 2022). As a response to these state policies, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe ultimately articulated their

support and protection for educators teaching on Tribal lands. In response, some educators vowed to continue to teach the content they believed needed to be taught in schools by flying under the radar. There was still, however, an undercurrent of nervousness about the potential consequences. I could sense it in my visits to school sites and in my conversations with former teachers, both as part of this research and otherwise. John shared

I would be tempted to try and do the Scopes Trial with these standards. You know, if the school would guarantee me I'd still get paid my salary even if I, even if the state takes away my teaching license over that. Oversight may be minimal, at least in some places, but if it were to come to their attention, well, this is evidently something that the ruling people in the state care very much about. I think they might well take punitive action. (John, personal communication, May 25, 2023)

Similarly, Tara, reflected on how she had seen the responses from other educators play out in schools, namely that fear could be one response to State actions, but also that there was a difference between individuals who were and were not concerned with the consequences of State action. She stated

Which is interesting too. Right. If you think about exposure to risk when you're most proximate to a system. But also is there a protection from the system for another brain wave? So a fear root. A root of fear is one. And then there's something else too. I do think there's a root of. ... I don't know...I'm not sure about the root...But it's something around not understanding the consequences,

the impact, not fully embracing the significance, not knowing, not understanding, not valuing. (Tara, personal communication, October 5, 2023)

In essence, several participants theorized that the state's attempt to instill fear in teachers and educators was sometimes alleviated by the Tribe's stance on protecting and advocating for educators. However, there were several instances where compliance with state mandates became more an issue of a lack of proximity to the consequences for Indigenous students.

### ***Policymakers as Protectors of Their Own Self-Interest***

The third major way that participants experienced government officials in South Dakota, particularly as it pertained to educational policymaking, was through the lens of political self-interest. There was general consensus that state policymakers were concerned with particular political agendas and relatively immune to the needs of communities and, particularly, Indigenous youth across the state. This was even experienced at the student level. One former student, Cheraye, reflected on her experience with the politics of South Dakota. When asked to describe South Dakota in three words, she replied, "I feel like promise breaking...I just feel like I don't have a place in like South Dakota politics. I don't know... greed comes to mind. Status. I feel like people only want to be in politics for the status of it. Not for actually making change" (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023). She further articulated that, even when it came to locally elected representatives and senators, there seemed to be a lack of interest from state policymakers in students and their needs, putting students in a place of feeling unrepresented. "You know, I feel like we're being the most impacted by a lot of things and we're not even represented...I know of, our representative in our Senate of,

like, the county but they never came into the high school. They never really asked the youth...what we thought, they never really came in and talked to us at all” (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023).

As I sat in the social studies standards hearing in April 2023, the deprioritization of Indigenous youth voices by decisionmakers in South Dakota felt resonant. When confronted with quantitative and qualitative data, or with mass bi-partisan protests from educators across the state, policymakers responded in multiple instances with continuing with their agenda anyway. The Board of Education standards, who were appointed by Governor Noem, were responsible for hearing testimony and voting on whether or not to pass the highly-contested, highly-controversial standards. The group, at the time of the social studies standards vote, consisted of several educators and former educators. At the time of the hearing, 1,295 public comments had been submitted in regard to the standards. 121 of those comments were in favor of the proposed standards, 37 were neutral, and 1137 were against adoption of the proposed standards for a range of reasons (Mayer, 2023). Primary opponent testimony and commentary focused on the age-appropriateness of the standards as well as the exclusion of Indigenous history and culture from them. Regardless of the overwhelming opposition to the document, the board voted 5-2 to pass them. One of the board members, former representative Phyllis Heineman, who voted to pass the standards, even went so far as to misrepresent testimony by an Indigenous student by focusing on his statement that “we have to come together.” By focusing on a rhetoric of unity and togetherness, she was simultaneously able to dishonor and ignore the opposition without consequence. She positioned those who opposed the standards as barriers to unity and herself and other supporters as those

who were striving for harmony. Julie Westra, wife of Governor Noem's then-Commissioner of Economic Development, framed her "pass" vote by saying that she "respects the process" and that she had received multiple complaints in her personal email, on her cellphone, or at the grocery store about the previous standards and only two complaints about the ones on the table at the time (Board of Education Standards Hearing, April 17, 2023, 4:34:15). Similarly, by completely ignoring the massive number of public comments opposing the document and focusing on only the conversations that she had on a personal level with individuals, Westra demonstrated that she, like several others, did not in fact "respect the process." This contradiction was also noticed by educators. Kat, who had invested significant time and energy into preparing students for their testimonies reflected, "But I, I mean, it was completely an undemocratic process, right? Like the state pushing through its agenda, regardless of how many people and the, how many people opposed...And it was just like, super messed up" (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023).

The hypocrisy of policymakers is a persistent reality in the current education policymaking climate of South Dakota. Another education stakeholder recognized the tendency of state officials, who will often publicly denounce Indigenous interests, to spin half-truths about what they support and do not support. This results in confusing and one-sided messaging that allows policymakers to protect their own self-interest by coming across as pro-parent, pro-student, or pro-education when, in fact, their priorities often rest with *white* parents, *white* students, and *white* education spaces. Like Westra's comments on "respecting the process," making "neutral" claims provides a type of immunity from accountability for policymakers which borders on gaslighting.

And, so there isn't really anything that counteracts that and I think there needs to be, not, not as much as an accountability but almost like a, you know, 'this is what's good for kids.' I know I heard our state Attorney General talk about, you know, there was some kind of commercial or news clip around Moms for Liberty and, you know, that alt right wing group and whether or not it was good. And he said, 'I support parent involvement' or something to that effect and I thought, well, which parents are you supportive of? And right now there isn't anything that counters, you know, some strong messaging just to like go with the flow, which is disconcerting (Nora, personal communication, October 23, 2023).

The experience that research participants articulated in terms of their relationships with and perspectives on state policymakers illuminated that policymakers are seen as actively working against the interests of Indigenous students. By ignoring the voices of Indigenous youth and, instead, spinning stories about their own righteousness and support for constituents, policymakers are generally able to maintain and protect a dominant political narrative about what and *who* matters in South Dakota. This becomes the vehicle by which they maintain, as Mignolo refers to it, coloniality of authority, and the coloniality of knowledge and subjectivity. It was infuriating to hear the committee blatantly ignore reality and feel as if there was zero process for accountability. Unfortunately, that is how things often go in South Dakota. To create a narrative that entirely ignores and erases Indigenous voices is to position them as "outside" or as "other." This creates a public perception that Indigenous peoples are either nonexistent or, like Schoenbeck said in the Senate State Affairs committee referenced earlier, "throwing rocks." Policymakers have dominated the conversation in such a way that any

opposition is seen as childish, whiny, and a waste of time. This allows them, as the ones who “know better,” to continue to make paternalistic decisions that conflict with the best interest of Indigenous young people. It comes across as an intentional power move rooted in paternalistic approaches to governance. And this is deeply felt.

### ***Policies and Priorities***

Several years ago, Nora and I spent some time organizing in Rosebud. We worked together to start a school board forum, where parents and teachers and other education stakeholders could come and hear from their school board candidates. Up to this point, the board had remained seemingly unchanged, at least in ideology, for as long as I had been living in South Dakota at least. At the forum, one of the candidates was asked about his perspective on Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings. He responded using a common right-wing tactic: to argue that the conversation was irrelevant and unnecessary. I can remember him pacing and declaring that there was no policy needed because the work was already happening. The room was a small trailer and was absolutely filled to maximum capacity. This was the first time there had been a space like this to question candidates and people were excited to attend. Over one-hundred people were packed into a tiny trailer that was used as a preschool building in a small community on the Reservation. They had questions for their candidates, which we had folks write down on notecards to ensure all major topics of concern were covered. Constituents asked questions, candidates answered, and the voters voted. It was exciting to see a change in leadership after so much time spent with the same board member and little change. Later, in our time visiting for this research, Nora stated, “At the end of the day, you know, policies really equal values, right?” (Nora, personal communication,

October 23, 2023). I agreed. In our experiences together, the policies created (or hindered) by policymakers were so frequently a product of their values system. In the example of this particular board member, the lack of support for a policy that was wanted by the community demonstrated a disconnect between values that situated white values as the right ones. And in a state like South Dakota, those values systems often involve the silencing of Indigenous voices.

Several years after the initial school board forum, Nora and I were able to provide support for a new board member's initiative to require language and cultural inclusion in schools. That policy passed. This signaled a shift in the values of the district that continue to evolve today. On the other hand, however, policies and the explicit and implicit state/district priorities that govern schools can also act as a vehicle by which educators and education stakeholders experience attempted state violence and control through practices rooted in coloniality. Policies themselves represent specific ideologies and knowledge that is prioritized in schooling by way of the broader dominant narrative about education. As stated in the previous section, this narrative and the associated values are often controlled by individuals with positional power, despite attempts to challenge them. From funding models to scheduling, participants broadly articulated a shared experience rooted in attempts, via policy, to undermine efforts to improve Indigenous education in the state.

**Personnel, Staffing, and Funding.** At the school and district levels, policies and prioritization that informed staffing procedures and use of funding often felt like extensions of the state's attempts to deprioritize Indigenous education. Allen, who works tirelessly to revitalizing Lakota language, specifically in schools, reflected on the high

student to teacher ratio for language classes and how it negatively impacts his language revitalization efforts.

There was one teacher and one para for 700 students, you know, if that's just for language that isn't enough, you know, like it's just not, not enough. We need a whole army here. And we need adequate time to teach them. And, so that's what I'm doing. I'm building an army here of language warriors. (Allen, personal communication, May 12, 2023)

In other instances, educators noted the practices of elevating individuals who might not be equipped to tackle the challenges facing Indigenous education in the State. Sarah stated, “And the sad reality is oftentimes the individuals who are running programs have, maybe have the skill set to be exceptional teachers in classroom settings, but don't have the global oversight necessary to manage a program to achieve systemic impact. And that stifles our ability to grow too (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023). On a similar note, April articulated a frustration with white educators seeking the approval of Indigenous educators and then proceeding to take up a great deal of time and resources intended for Indigenous perspectives. This creates a climate where white educators sometimes become seen and positioned as the “experts” on Indigenous Education. This also, therefore, becomes another pathway by which Indigenous solutions are deprioritized. She stated

Educators like our stamp of approval almost as a way to say like, ‘See it’s credible now.’ So I don't, I don't know, but I think we're in a time where we have many educators calling out or calling in other white educators. And yet we're still seeing the same things happen, maybe a little bit less like violent... We see so

many individuals who are like, ‘Yes, I’m on board, I’m a co-conspirator’ and then they are quite literally taking 20 minutes of a 30-minute panel. (April, personal communication, July 19, 2023)

It is important to note that, in addition to the sentiments shared by Sarah and April, the director of the Office of Indian Education for South Dakota is a white man with minimal experience in Indigenous education. With a background in business administration and law, Osborn was selected, arguably, for the position due to his experience navigating federal and state governments.

In terms of personnel, by either under-resourcing critical Indigenous education areas or allocating resources to individuals who are not the appropriate nor “best” people to lead in Indigenous education spaces, district and state policies and priorities send clear ideological messages about the importance of Indigenous education, and who should be leading it. In addition, these priorities have very real impacts on whether progress is made in relation to the broad range of priorities identified by Indigenous educators.

School, district, state, and federal models for funding and allocation of resources also create mechanisms by which educators experience the diminishing of the importance of Indigenous education. Many participants reflected on moments of having to change their practice due to funding or the impact of funding on schools and students. Tate recalled a time where she wanted to order a globe map for her classroom and was encouraged to print one instead, which felt like a disservice to her students. She wanted them to have the experience of using a globe. Furthermore, Kat connected funding issues to the teacher shortage in the state.

I think that's like one part of the problem. Yeah. You know, there's like the layer of drastically underfunded title one schools in our reservations. You don't get as many resources as, like schools in different districts. Teacher shortage is, I think, a thing everywhere right now. But I think reservations particularly have seen that as an acute problem even before the pandemic...the pandemic isn't what is causing the teacher shortage. It's always been an issue. It's just exacerbated. People are fed up. That's like another layer of the problem. (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023)

Judith, similarly, summarized the connection between under-resourcing and maintenance of the status quo. She said

It's like you are, you are creating a set of conditions that will allow you to continue to operate in the way that you are because the people that are getting most affected by this are already suffering this and they don't necessarily have the resources right now in the current state of things to fight back. And the people who do, which are the rest, right, are supporting you because you've created this environment where lack of empathy is driving them to like almost blame Tribal populations for their current, you know, like circumstances instead of making you, you being the system, you being leadership at the state level, right, you being responsible for those conditions in the first place. (Judith, personal communication, November 16, 2023)

By controlling the flow of resources and elevating individuals into positions of power who may not be proximate to (or care about) Indigenous Education priorities, school, district, state, and federal policies create the conditions for the continued deprioritization

and lack of care given to supporting Indigenous students throughout the state. This establishes a situation whereby the challenges faced by participants become almost cyclical. Educators constantly must advocate for more time for Indigenous language and culture, for more staff to fill the most basic positions, and for the right to be considered experts in their own work rather than, typically, white men and women. Attempts to address funding disparities through more policymaking often fall short of their “promises,” due to the policy programs themselves also being underfunded, or a lack of realization of the stakes for students. Allen shared

Biden's administration which, you know, bless their little democratic hearts...they're working on something that will be sustainable. It's a 10 year plan to help native languages thrive...So there's funding out there for native language programs, however they don't know what's happening with BIE schools. And so they were like, well, how do we help you? And one of the things was, is like, well, we don't want to rat race for grants anymore because we're only allowed so much money from those grants and we got to compete with other tribes and other tribal programs for this money. We need to figure out a way to just get the money. We could use it, rather than all these stipulations and these grants to do. You know, like, how can we use it? I mean, I still think there should be stipulations but, you know, and then they're like, oh, well, what about, you know...Title six? I was like Title Six is probably the most underfunded title program out there.

(Allen, personal communication, May 12, 2023)

Title six, which is a formula grant program overseen by the Federal government, “represents the U.S. Department of Education’s largest investment in addressing the

unique academic and cultural needs of American Indian and Alaska Native children. The program is aimed at supporting services that are 1.) responsive to the unique cultural, language, and educational needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students and 2.) help these students meet academic standards” (Woodworth et al., 2019, p.v). In the experience of many educators, this funding is generally not sufficient to take on the work they would like to. In Sarah’s perspective, this insufficiency often came in the form of how funds were used. Her belief was that Title VI funds are often not seen as being able to have a system-wide impact but are, rather, used for smaller initiatives that do not really lead to massive overhauls in how districts approach Indigenous education.

So I'm always gonna start with the Title Six Indian Education Program because that's where I have the most experience in overseeing the program. But I think the biggest missed opportunity is that it's not perceived as a systemically inclusive program rather, it's, it's seen as a, it's seen as this ad hoc addition to what's already standing without regard to the systemic potential, it has to affect change. So I think that there's a missed opportunity across the nation within districts that have Title six funding to make a systemic change for increased educational outcomes of our students while also immersing the non indigenous students into the cultural language, history and traditions of the indigenous inhabitants of their geographies. (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023)

When funding sources are underutilized or even underfunded themselves, even the most promising of aspirations can fall short. These shortcomings, however, are not only the result of policies, but of the ideologies that anchor their development in the first place. With core academic subjects being seen as the primary goal for education, anything

related to Indigenous language or culture is seen as an add-on or something extra. Because of this, it can be deprioritized and underfunded and is often seen as either a vehicle to get kids to perform better on academic subjects or something that can be sacrificed for the “more important” content.

Without truly systemic reform of how Indigenous education is approached, policies will continue to feel like band-aids to a much larger issue.

I think all policy pertaining to the education of Indigenous students is extremely superficial and it creates an opportunity for the government to check a box that they're either offering reparations or doing their part to restore what has been broken through government funded boarding school, the government funded boarding school system. The assimilation efforts are most pronounced through our social interactions with people. (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023)

In Judith's classroom, the mandate for Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings did not seem sufficient, at a four-times per year requirement.

You're telling me that I need to include the relevant pedagogy four times in an academic year and then I'm complying with policy, right? It's like, how much is that because on paper, you can say, 'Oh yeah, we're introducing OSEUs, we're including culturally responsive content...aside from that, removing the identity and race and like, honestly just decolonized history perspective from classrooms in Rosebud...it's asking our kids to not be Lakota for eight hours of their day. Like, that's just not reasonable. (Judith, personal communication, November 16, 2023)

In this sense, policies regarding Indigenous education in South Dakota are limited in their ability to affect broad, far-reaching change, however they seem to be almost unlimited in their ability to send messages about ideological values, commitment to Indigenous youth, and whether or not the people behind the policies are genuinely invested in ensuring that Indigenous youth have an educational experience that is equitable.

**Academic Success.** Notions of academic success are deeply intertwined with political legacies and priorities. In regards to the Texas state curriculum, for example, Valenzuela (2019) states, “Alongside prevailing discourses and ideologies that falsely and arrogantly assume Western, European ‘superiority’--an ideology that justified violent, colonizing expansionism (Mignolo, 2012)--the unwieldy organization of the social studies high school curriculum and its marriage to a false myth of nationhood, arguably renders it a key instrument for the preservation of colonial power” (p. 201). In South Dakota schools, the connection between state standards, academic success, and political ideology was felt by educators as well. “What I noticed for those standards are, it seems very politically slanted. The standards mandate a particular definition of patriotism that must be taught, which to me seems improperly political because that’s a word used in many different ways by many different people” (John, personal communication, May 25, 2023).

When standards are connected to concepts of patriotism and Americanness, and any pushback against such ideological foundations is seen as anti-American, success becomes defined through a lens of compliance with dominant and colonial political priorities and a preoccupation with the maintenance of current systems of power. The idea that education is not and cannot be neutral is not new (Freire, 2006; Giroux, 2019;

hooks, 1994) and the present battle over curricula and standards is no exception to the historical struggle for power over education. This was expressed and felt by study participants in several ways, primarily in the sense that education continues to serve as a vehicle for the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into colonial systems. Sarah stated, “The public education system in South Dakota is very successful in assimilating our people. And it continues to do that and it continues to, while it imposes a very colonial academic mindset, it also continues to erase the language, culture, and history that make our people who they are” (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

Participants in this study expressed a number of perspectives and critiques of notions of academic success. Specifically, this area of concern was brought up by a number of former public-school students who recognized that “academic success” influenced how they experienced their teachers. Cassandra stated,

I think the barrier for them [teachers] is, honestly, this sounds terrible, but I feel like they really just like, do not really care enough unless the student is showing like academic success. Like, I feel like teachers will really prioritize their students who like show academic success versus the ones who are struggling and it’s sort of like a favorite thing. I guess like, ‘Oh, this student is doing the best in the classroom so she’s gonna be my favorite.’ And I think that’s what’s really lacking is the teachers aren’t like looking to the students who are struggling. They’re not offering enough support to them. (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023)

In Cassandra’s experience, if students were not showing progress towards standards, they often were not provided with support from their teachers, which seems almost

counterintuitive. When asked to elaborate, she shared that she believed teachers were deeply influenced by the opinion of their “bosses” and wanted to seem like a good teacher, so they would align themselves most closely with students who were succeeding academically. In a climate where standards can be connected to coloniality of knowledge, Cassandra’s critique points out that compliance with coloniality is often rewarded and that teachers may, in some cases, become vehicles for state hegemony. This does not necessarily mean that academic success is equivalent to assimilation, but it does complicate the role of the teacher as either a conduit or disruptor of state-sanctioned ideological violence. Perhaps it is for this reason that some former educators, like Kat, expressed skepticism regarding state-defined characterizations of success.

Another former public-school student, Cheraye, shared her desire for educators to openly voice their opinions on important political topics in order to build a sense of trust and care, however noted that this was rare. Her desire for school to be a space where educators engage in public critique and advocacy alongside their students is, in some cases, hindered by teachers’ desire for and focus on “academic success.” She stated,

Sometimes the teacher might stray away from talking about that topic, rather than confronting it or, just like, I feel like teachers do their best to not voice their opinion, which is nice. But, I feel like there is sometimes a time to voice their opinion, especially whenever it comes... I don't really know a lot about, like, what's going on in the politics but I feel as if there was something going on, related to Indigenous people, I would like my teacher to talk about it and stand with it and to let us know that they do stand with it, you know, and I understand that like, people have like different viewpoints for different reasons, but I felt

more connected to my teachers when they, where they had the same viewpoints as me. (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023)

Students' perceptions that teachers feel compelled to comply by either celebrating students who were succeeding academically or by withholding their political opinions on important topics lift up the crucial nature of the role of the teacher in disrupting or maintaining state-defined conceptualizations of success. Some teachers acknowledged that they felt the pressure for compliance with state mandates and district regulations therein. This pressure, however, was not without critique. Carm, for example, shared, "And yet, me, being a first year teacher, I was just like 'Ok, I gotta work on this. I'm gonna do this' and...it just didn't work. I was good at listening to feedback. But when I implemented it, it just screwed up the kids, I guess" (Carm, personal communication, May 25, 2023). As an educator, Carm was always the type of person who wanted to excel. She would, and still does, put long hours into her planning and preparation, but her biggest strength was her authenticity. It was when Carm felt pulled from this authenticity that she felt like things were going awry. The pressure to comply, while present, was also something that she was able to recognize and work against.

In general, the role of educators on Rosebud is widely formed around how success is defined and measured through state standards. While this is not necessarily earth-shattering news, the connection between academic success and state hegemony has far-reaching implications. Perhaps most compellingly, as shared in this section, this connection informs how students experience their teachers and how teachers define their own successes and failures. Cassandra shared

I don't really have a lot of context on the state policies and such. I do know my school was a low-performing school considering state policies. But I think the teachers are pushing this good representation of themselves [by aligning themselves with 'successful' students] to, like, hopefully land a better job within the state or other states. I feel like they look at the school, the lower performing school, and they think, 'This is not what I'm worth. I'm worth more than this. I'm worth more than to be working at a low-performing school and teaching to these struggling students. (Cassandra., personal communication, May 4, 2023)

### **“What are we doing to our kids?”: Education and Educators**

Connected to shared experiences with colonial perspectives and reactions to “academic success” was participants’ broader experiences with education and educators. Primarily, formal and informal educators as well as former students of the various school systems on the Reservation, characterized their experiences with present-day education as frustrating and harmful. While there were positive points, these were few and far between. In general, participants characterized education as a space that is disconnected from reality and forces disconnection between students, themselves, and their identities. Former students noted challenges with receiving support from their school community and teachers identified a lack of support for their work. This was particularly true at the high school level for students. Additionally, individuals across the range of education stakeholders who were interviewed identified racial and gendered bias as formative components of their experiences with education. They felt that the bias was willful and that it represented commitments of schooling systems to everyone and everything but students.

### *Severed Care*

Josie is someone who embodies an ethic of care. For as long as I have known her, she has felt like family. As we were visiting for this research, I was reminded of the ways in which she has demonstrated care in my life over the years. The stoop outside of our shared office on Rosebud has heard our many conversations over the years. Josie has long been the person who has held space for me after every breakup or heartache. But she is also someone who is easy to *think* with. Several years ago, were sitting in a professional development session facilitated by our mutual dear friend Curtis, and we were reflecting on an article by Amanda Holmes and Norma González. As we sipped what I considered to be the world's best diner coffee out of white porcelain mugs, the sound of scribbling, pens tapping, and brief pauses to think filled the space. After some time to think, we had a chance to process our thinking out loud and Josie reflected, in regard to young people, "Are we preparing them for the world as it *is* or are we preparing them for the world as it *should be*?" This question has resonated with me in the years since. It frames up a lot of how I consider my own pathways to resistance and provides a sort of tacit reminder that the way things are does not have to be the way things will always be. In our conversation for this research, she shared her perspectives on how schools today are intertwined with their colonial histories:

But what boarding schools did was actually, like, sever a type of care that existed in the community. It separated kids and families purposefully, which ultimately, to this day, we can see that type of care that existed, which was just always being close, always being proximate, protecting children as they're both vulnerable and open to the world. Schools just removed that ability. And we see that echoing

through education and in communities and in every institution. (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023)

This sentiment, that schooling has served a purpose of disconnecting young people from themselves and the people who love them by removing proximity and protection, was further demonstrated in the experiences with schooling expressed by both former students and current (and future) parents of students in schools on the Reservation, whether in public or BIE schools. Where education was formerly a communal and cultural experience that promoted students' connections with one another and their surroundings, it presently is felt as a space where students struggle and yearn for care and support.

One of the major indicators of severed care was (and is) the disconnection between young people and adults in schooling spaces, which was frequently described as being the result of, as expressed earlier, teachers' desire to associate themselves with high-performing students and distance themselves from low-performing students through the lens of state-defined concepts of success. The division, however, was often also experienced through a lens of racial and gendered bias. At this level, forms of bias created even more divisions within the faculty at schools where some teachers felt they had to distance themselves from their colleagues based on their own identities and their colleagues' biases towards them and their students. Cassandra shared,

Nobody wants to have students struggling in their class and no one really wants to offer those students support is what I feel like when I think about my high school years, when I think about the teachers...When people think of their classroom, the teachers want the students to think of the high-achieving students, they want them to think of all the positives, all the great things that could come out of their course

or classroom instead of the negative things that could come out of people who are struggling. (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023)

Cheraye's experience with school during COVID lockdown and shortly after corroborated Cassandra's characterization of schooling. During lockdown, Cheraye, like so many students, felt disconnected from school. As teachers scrambled to provide remote content, many students fell behind and experienced consequences related to their physical and mental health. Cheraye, who previously had been a very "high-achieving" student and experienced feelings of disconnection during the pandemic that resulted in lowered grades, felt brushed aside.

I had this one teacher and I was pretty close with her because I had multiple classes with her. And throughout my years I would have class with her. Like, even my senior year I had lunch with her...But I remember telling her what I wanted to do after high school, which is come to U of O [University of Oregon] where I'm at right now and she, like, kind of discouraged me to do it in a way and that like, 'its expensive and there's so much other things you gotta do and there's like this and that' and it kind of hurt my feelings...she was like one of the only teachers I was close with. So I just didn't talk to her about my goals. I don't know. And also like, that was kind of the only relationship I had with any teachers in the high school. (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023)

In fact, over the course of her senior year, Cheraye noted that more adults discouraged her from attending the University of Oregon than supported her decision. She shared these stories with me through tears and a relatable ache for connection and belonging. MaLeah, another former student, also articulated a lack of support from her teachers

when it came to beginning to consider post-secondary options. She struggled with a fear of failure and a lack of help in school that, like Cheraye, caused her to second-guess herself. Both former students articulated that their confidence was shaken by experiences with lack of support and care from educators. MaLeah stated, “I don’t know. I would second guess myself all the time, you know? I just wanted to be smart and sometimes, I don’t know, I feel like I tried too hard” (MaLeah, personal communication, July 20, 2023). Cheraye, similarly, doubted her own abilities and strength. She felt discouraged from pursuing higher education and unsure of whether she was capable of “making it” on her own.

I feel like teachers in high school, like, they don’t take the time to make those connections in a sense. Now that I’m thinking back on it, I don’t think a lot of teachers took the time out of their day, just to ask how your day was in high school. And also I feel like, in high school, teachers are kind of locked to their rooms. You don’t really see them outside of their classroom, and whenever I would see my teachers out of my class and always hi to them and they’d just be like, ‘what are *you* doing out here?’ I feel like maybe if I had stronger connections with my teachers, I wouldn’t have felt so scared of the future. I feel like they’re just trying to pass you by. Just trying to get you to pass just so you can pass and so that you’re out of their hair so that they can say that ‘these kids are graduating.’ I feel like they’re not really there to help you create a future, just help you get through this one phase in your life. Not even help you get through it but kind of push you through it. (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023)

In spaces where it is a common experience to feel brushed aside and unwanted, it is not difficult to understand why students feel hesitant about the future of schooling and even nervous for their siblings and children. Cassandra expressed concern for her younger siblings. “I want the district to offer them support, support and services for them to go above where I’m at. I want them to achieve more than what I have and to do more than what I have” (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023). MaLeah, whose son was just a couple years old at the time we visited, was already worried about his schooling experience. “I think about it sometimes because I think about, like, him going to school now...But it’s really scary. You don’t want no one to mistreat your kid” (MaLeah, personal communication, July 20, 2023).

I asked Cassandra if she had any theories about why schools do not feel supportive and why teachers might only want to associate themselves with high-performing students. Her response was, “I hate to use this is and it’s not really an analogy...I’m not trying to bash all the teachers that come into the district...But also I feel like a lot of people come in with this like, mentality of like saving students or saving their classroom, saving the school, saving the district” (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023). The idea of Indigenous peoples as in need of saving is deeply entrenched in coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of authority (Mignolo, 2007) and educational goals of assimilation. In one district school, if a student would refuse to do their work, the teacher could keep them for detention, which was where they could get extra help on their work. The implied meaning here, through a decolonial lens, is deeply troubling. Compliance is built into the schooling structure and support is simultaneously used as a benefit of getting in trouble (if the student wants and needs that support but does not

know how to ask for it) and a punishment (if the student refuses to comply and then is sent to a space where they are essentially forced to). The attempted removal of student agency in this way feels remnant of the ways in which the federal government would withhold rations or other necessities from Indigenous peoples who did not comply with restrictive hunting policies, boarding school policies, and religious suppression policies (Newland, 2022). When compliance means loss of self and non-compliance means loss of sustenance and support, Indigenous students become trapped in a carceral and colonial schooling system. There is a deep connection between this practice and the more explicit forced assimilation policies of the past, which were also carried out by “well-meaning” people as explored in chapters one and two.

In discussing how educators respond to situations like the social studies standards and the attacks on teachers’ agency to teach the content they believe students should know, multiple educators noted that they had been in discussions where teachers had identified that they would leave teaching or, at least, South Dakota, if they were forced to teach that content. Aimee shared, “I’ve heard a lot of teachers say, you know what, as soon as those go into effect I’m not teaching anymore. I’m gonna quit because I don’t believe in it” (Aimee, personal communication, October 18, 2023). In some instances, this seemed to be rooted in fear, which was explored in the previous section of this chapter. In other instances, however, and particularly through the lens that Cassandra shared, there seems to be a “save or abandon” mentality present as opposed to a trend of teachers exercising their agency to find creative ways to navigate and undermine oppressive learning standards. While some educators see this as a moral stance against government overreach, students sometimes perceive it as a practice of being deprioritized

by their teachers in response to colonial pressures. To students, it can almost seem as if there are teachers who will abandon them if they feel they cannot save them, who will abandon them if they cannot (according to policy) teach the content they want to teach, and who will abandon them unless they (students) give in to attempts to assimilate them into colonial schooling systems. The devastating effects on students' sense of self-worth that were shared by Cassandra, MaLeah, and Cheraye illuminate the very real violence and harm that are currently being caused by coloniality of knowledge and authority in classrooms and the practices that coincide with this ideology.

### ***Bias***

In addition to being spaces where students experience a lack of support, schools are often felt, by students and some educators, to be filled with bias, particularly across lines of race and gender. This sometimes meant that white history was elevated while courses pertaining to students' identities were deemed less important or less rigorous. Cheraye's experience with history and Lakota language demonstrate this issue.

In my history class, you know, you learn about history you would learn in a white city...even some of the material he had was really biased and definitely a white perspective and you could tell maybe he didn't notice it because he was white himself...here [at University of Oregon], we learn that language helps with wellness, it helps secure your identity. We didn't learn that in middle school. It was like, here's a Lakota class, go, go learn Lakota. We weren't taught the significance of our language to our culture, and we weren't taught the importance of our history...There's a lot of white men in the high school. I was thinking about this. I think that's also why relationships are so strained in high school

especially. I feel like as a woman, it's a little different because you're growing into a woman and, you know, people view you differently. I think my experience with my teachers are different than my male peers. You know, they might have said they were best friends with all their teachers because all the teachers were men. (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023).

Additionally, Cassandra also reflected on her experiences with bias in school, which she saw reflected at the student and teacher levels.

I felt like a lot of people prioritized the boys and their academic achievements over the girls. And I experienced it myself throughout my middle school and my high school years and I felt like it really hindered my confidence a lot. And also I felt like a lot of my female teachers as well experienced that from their male higher ed [administration] people as well. But I think a huge thing is like, the sexism is real within the district and it's very present still. I think that's a huge thing that needs to be changed. I hate this idea that like, I feel like when I think of my district, I think of these people saying 'Oh, women can't, like, teach as well, can't learn as well' which may not always be true or be the case. But when I think of my old memories, that's just what I really feel. (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023)

Experiences with bias were not limited to recent students and were a trend in K-12 schooling experiences amongst current Indigenous educators who attended or whose relatives attended Reservation schools. Sarah shared,

Both my grandmas were boarding school students. And I think that the realization that they've never received a Liberation Day in many senses of that word made

me more determined to create a Liberation Day for myself and my future generations because I don't ever want, I, I struggled with my identity development because of my, the shame that was imposed on all of my grandparents for being who they were biologically. (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023)

Some educators also experienced bias as Indigenous teachers in the school systems on the Reservation. Carm, for example, reflected on how she felt ostracized and isolated due to her identity, but also how she saw teachers' biases play out towards students.

They just always have that mentality of it's one person. One. Probably one person that has a high status within the school that tells the rest of the parents or whoever are following their lead, that they share out a narrative about the kids and then they all stick together and follow that narrative and that's how it usually goes. (Carm, personal communication, May 25, 2023)

She added that she felt like teachers would band together based on a shared (white) identity and that this shared identity created inherent trust and camaraderie, but also a lack of pushback against harmful narratives and stereotypes about students.

I asked several former educators and education leaders to share their thoughts on why implicit bias continues to permeate schooling spaces, despite progress forward and steps taken by districts to require professional development related to bias specifically. Nora shared

I think it's just the nature of implicit bias. There's all kinds of messaging that could lead teachers to think that there is something lacking in them. There's a

shortcoming that they have which needs to be overcome. So I think that and then just the nature of white fragility. Just a resistance too. And plus it was such a huge huge training event, you know, that it allowed people to just disconnect and sit in the back with their arms crossed” (Nora, personal communication, October 23, 2023). Aimee, who trains educators professionally, noticed something similar. “Yeah, they’re predetermining what can and cannot happen within those classrooms and it’s creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. I see it every day. (Aimee, personal communication, October 18, 2023)

The bias that exists towards Indigenous students (and teachers) in schooling spaces sometimes further fuels self-doubt amongst students. “Sometimes, in middle school we would take Lakota classes and it would be embarrassing to speak Lakota. But when we were in elementary school, we didn’t have that mindset or we didn’t have any negative connotations towards being Indigenous” (Cheraye, personal communication, May 4, 2023). The “amount of harm that’s been done by the educational system” (April, personal communication, July 19, 2023) also plays out in self-doubt and strained relationships amongst Indigenous adults. Several former educators noted experiencing tensions related to identity bias, conceptualizations of what it means to be Native “enough” or not, and other long-lasting impacts of systemic anti-Indigenusness in schooling. Tate shared about her experiences with being perceived as “less Indigenous” due to her spirituality. “I’m a full blood but because I start with ‘Father God,’ I’ll never be picked to pray in a public space because people want to hear Tunkasila. So I think it really comes down to us as adults of like, how we socialize and how we put labels on ourselves or people put labels on us” (Tate, personal communication, September 8, 2023). Her experience not

only demonstrates a common experience with racial bias, but also with a type of performance that is expected of Indigenous people. There is an underlying colonial expectation, linked to Lomawaima's characterization of the "Safety Zone" (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), that there are certain expressions of Indigeneity that are allowable and others that are not within a colonial state. This is simply another manifestation of the coloniality of authority and knowledge. When students (and adults) express their Indigenous identity in ways that push boundaries or policy, they often experience pushback from their white teachers, peers, and colleagues. However, when Indigeneity looks a certain way that is deemed appropriate, allowable, and safe, the pushback ceases. Or perhaps even more concurrently, white educators and education officials only tend to support Indigeneity when it "looks" the way they want it to or when it feels comfortable and distant. Nora spoke on this as well.

For example, the superintendent [of White River] and Peri [a principal in the district] came over to the Indian Ed Committee and...we talked about a lot of things and one of the things that we talked about was like a Native club and I haven't seen that started yet at White River. But I know when I first got there [to the school board], one of the teachers who's now the elementary principal said to me, 'We went to the, you know, the Powwow there and we didn't see too many of our young people out there dancing or costume, regalia and whatnot.' And I said, 'Well does that surprise you?' Because the affirmation, the identity affirmation didn't happen. And I had this one senior who had a Native surname come in and said, 'You know, I'm dark. I have this Indian last name, but I don't know what being Native means.' And this was a senior in high school. And so, I think it's

less about the identity of the students, but more the culture of the institution and how, you know, do we only want students and appreciate students when they dance for us in their regalia? (Nora, personal communication, October 23, 2023)

### *Committed to Coloniality*

The students and education professionals with whom I visited for this study are frustrated with the current status of education and how it is experienced by young people. Fighting against a system that, at every turn, seems to be intentionally committed to upholding coloniality in schools weighs heavily on many of them. There seem to be commitments to the status quo, regardless of advances made in theory and practice and regardless of the work by so many individuals to more forcibly turn the direction of education on Rosebud towards equity for Indigenous students. Aimee, for example, noted how she sees the same practices playing out in classrooms, even though they have been debunked and rebranded as ineffective. “Well, I think there’s not a whole lot happening at the K-12 level. That’s what I’m really seeing. It’s a sit-and-get type of culture. And so students are expected still to come in, sit down, do what you’re told. Don’t think about what I’m asking you to do, just do what I tell you to do” (Aimee personal communication, October 18, 2023). Dan, who works in a similar role as Aimee, expressed noticing that teachers were reluctant to push against harmful state policies (in regards to the Critical Race Theory ban enacted in South Dakota), despite a Tribal resolution that supported the teaching of history through a critical lens.

I have heard of some teachers saying, ‘well, it’s too, I can’t risk my livelihood on these things so I better just toe the line here.’ And really, it’s an excuse because the districts have said ‘You have coverage. We’ll go to bat for you. We have

sovereignty and this is our realm and we're saying it's ok.' But they're still saying, 'Well, I just have to be safe. I'm going to stay in my comfort zone as opposed to accepting things that are more important to the community that I should be teaching in my classroom'. (Dan, personal communication, September 28, 2023)

Commitments to coloniality come in a variety of forms, whether commitment to harmful curriculum and content because of a fear of the state or commitment to outdated methods of instruction that prompt students to disengage from learning. In some instances, the practices by which schools and school boards operate also denote a form of compliance to colonial practices. Nora reflected on her time as a school board member in White River. "I never attended one of their school board trainings in part because it was like, learning the Roberts Rules of Order and I don't care about stuff like that. But a lot of school board members were really bought into this idea of earning a gold star from the school board association and that really meant something" (Nora, personal communication, October 23, 2023). Another example of school operational norms that reproduce and maintain coloniality came through in Tate's experience with conflicting priorities and low expectations for students.

I got a second-grader, two second-graders this year, who don't even know his letters. One knows his letters, the other one doesn't. The one that knows his letters can at least make the sound of them. But the other one can't write his numbers, you know what I mean? And it's just like, come on SF [the Tribal school], what are we doing? You know, you're a BIE school, like fuck let go of some of those sweaters and shirts you're always ordering and get some damn books in their

hands, send them books home, put them in their homes, you know what I mean?

(Tate, personal communication, September 8, 2023)

April, who works with early-career educators named that she believes teachers and educators must be doing work to interrogate their own proximity and loyalty to colonial practices. She asked, “And so what parts of you [educators and state leaders] are you inherently, like, committed to that system that harms Indigenous students?” (April, personal communication, July 19, 2023). The willingness to continue down pathways that have historically harmed Indigenous students (and, I would argue, most students) is frustrating to participants who see it as an explicit choice made by individuals in powerful positions. The weight of experiencing this is painfully heavy, particularly for Indigenous educators who noted their fatigue. There is a feeling of constantly swimming upstream, using varied strategies to widen the circle of individuals engaged in critique of systems, and, in some cases, ultimately feeling the crushing weight of the possibility that things might not change. As Cheraye stated, “As I get older and I start realizing how much things need to be changed and what you need to do to make those changes, it’s all becoming a lot and everything. So I’m just like, kind of worried that, like, I don’t know. Like we’re not gonna be able to make as big of a change as I thought we were gonna” (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023).

Despite the reality of Tribal sovereignty, the state has managed to firmly solidify its perceived position as the ultimate authority on the education of Indigenous children. This has created a climate where many educators, whether they are critical of the state systems or not, feel compelled to comply with it, often at the expense of students. Still, however, there are educators, like those with whom I visited for this study, who continue

to explore, to take risks, and to challenge hegemonic and colonial forces in the pursuit of something different, something more equitable, and something more healing.

## **Chapter Five: Findings, Part 2: Pedagogies of Relationality, Resistance, and Sustenance as Decolonial Process**

Scholars characterize the nature and practice of decoloniality in several complex ways. Primarily, however, decolonial projects constitute epistemic shifts in naming, understanding, and being in the world. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) state, “Decoloniality means here decolonization of knowledge and being by epistemically and affectively de-linking from the imperial/colonial organization of society” (p. 132). Epistemic de-linking and the closely related (sometimes used interchangeably) epistemic disobedience comprise the processes by which groups and individuals separate their thinking from Western constructions of knowledge. “Delinking is then necessary because there is no way out of the colonality of power from within Western (Greek and Latin) categories of thoughts. Consequently, de-linking implies epistemic disobedience rather than the constant search for ‘newness.’ Epistemic disobedience takes us to a different place, to a different beginning...to spatial sites of struggles and building rather than to a new temporality within the same space” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 45). As explored in Chapter One, Cusicanqui (2012), Valenzuela (2019), and Honig (2021) take up the concept of epistemic delinking in different ways, connecting it to community self-determination, wherein communities are less interested in negotiating settler societies or figuring out ways to make them work for them, but rather stand firmly in Indigenous sovereignty by engaging in refusals, disobedience, and practices of resurgence. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) also discuss a similar concept through the lens of decolonization and regeneration. They argue against institutional approaches to decolonization and focus, rather, on “shifts in thinking and action that emanate from recommitments and reorientations at the level of

self that, over time and through proper organization, manifest as broad social and political movements to challenge state agendas and authorities” (p. 611).

While the participants whose experiences and reflections were shared in Chapter Four frequently found themselves having to navigate the colonial and imperial nature of both state and federal realities, they also engaged in daily epistemic acts of delinking, disobedience, and refusal. Their processes and practices of choosing to name and rename the world in accordance with a different, decolonial reality, constitute daily acts of self-determination, generally outside the confines of a state or federally-defined Tribal Self-Determination. In our conversations, three clear epistemic frames emerged as foundational ways participants conceptually organized their epistemic delinking. While each frame has distinct and unique characteristics in terms of roles, goals, and processes, they are intimately connected and deeply intertwined with one another. In what follows, I will attempt to narrate these frames as well as their unique approaches to educational reality in South Dakota.

### **“My Mom Said You’re My Auntie”: Relationality and Protective Care**

Carm described a day in her class when a young person came into class and exclaimed, “My mom said you’re my auntie, so you’re my auntie, I guess!” (Carm, personal communication, May 25, 2023). While families look and act in a variety of ways and care is shown in equally as many, if not more ways, each of the educators and former students with whom I visited framed their thinking of relational education around a few particular components. Care. Protection. Belonging. Showing *up* for kids. To take on the role of a teacher, school leader, education policymaker, etc. meant, to these participants, to commit to a particular type of care and a set of values in their work with young people.

The conceptualization of care that they expressed differed from the “change the world” rhetoric or “agent of change” persona so commonly expressed by education stakeholders or in teacher education programs. Rather, a relational practice rooted in authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) and kinship was more felt by participants to be a moral and ethical imperative. This created a framework where the work of loving, protecting, trusting, and caring for young people meant caring for their communities, their spirits, their sense of belonging, and their connections with themselves.

### ***Protective Care as an Ethical Responsibility***

One day, several years ago, Josie and I were visiting a school. It was an older building situated in a community about 20 miles from the main town on the Reservation. It was a small, familial community, and one where Josie had spent significant time as an educator. The condemned building had been replaced by several modular outbuildings. While the school itself was not representative of the most up-to-date facilities, the modulars were nestled amongst trees. This created a physical sense of being held by the environment around us. As we arrived at the school, the students were outside playing at recess. They ran to greet Josie, who they saw as an auntie from their time learning with her as younger students. Each had an exciting update on their lives. My sense, in this moment, was that there was a deep sense of trust and safety built between Josie and her former students and their families. This extended beyond the four walls of her classroom and into her daily life, so much so that when Josie became pregnant with her first child, the students in her class immediately recognized the baby as their relative. This is indicative of something deeper than a typical teacher-student relationship. “I simultaneously believe that there’s always a choice and you absolutely can opt out. It’s

just if you're walking in alignment and if you're like walking your prayer then that's actually not a true option...When you choose not to [opt out], you have to simultaneously choose that something else is possible" (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023). Josie, in this part of the conversation, was referencing a type of care for young people that acknowledges power in a relationship, but where that power takes the form of "a care over, but it's more of a protective way of being and honors what is already in existence, which is like your little brother or your sister or whoever in your family" (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023). This conceptualization of care was reiterated throughout many of the conversations with participants, wherein they spoke about love, risk, standing behind young people, and shielding them from harmful systems, regardless of the cost. This was almost the exact opposite of the "save or abandon" mentality that characterized student experiences in schooling, as explored in Chapter Four. Rather, an education experience rooted in this type of care requires educators to honor and protect students from harmful policies and systems, while simultaneously creating space for them to be nurtured, to grow in their relationships with the world around them and with themselves. The educator, in this sense, is not necessarily an advocate who stands out front and speaks on behalf of students (although this persona was also expressed in another epistemic framework that will be discussed later). They are, instead, responsible for providing a nurturing environment and a shield from the social factors that keep young people from being who they are authentically. It is important to note, too, that participants did not necessarily frame this role through the lens of schooling or formal education. The role was imagined and felt as a responsibility held by all adults to young people regardless of our professional relationships to them. In

this sense, there was no specific or different ideal role for policymakers or the state, as they would have the same responsibilities: to protect young people from the things that make it difficult for them to be themselves and to create the conditions for them to feel connection and belonging.

And so, at the heart of it is a kid, like a world in which a Native child is able to be who they are, how they are, the way that they want to be and the conditions around them support them to do that. And I think in that process, like their entire identity, which I think is what it means to be Indigenous is like your entire identity all the way down to your feet and the land, are supported in those conditions or in that environment. (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023)

Participants embody this responsibility in different ways, aligned with their unique strengths. Sitting in Tara and Dan's kitchen one day, for example, there was a constant flow of young people coming and going. Whether looking for work, wanting a place to hang out, or needing space to process a difficult life experience, the door was constantly open. Tara would offer tea and a listening ear. Dan would offer time and something to do. This was a space where everyone was welcome and where no problem was too big or too small to bring to the table. Their home was frequently offered as a space to build community and connection. In this sense, they did not relegate their collective sense of protective care to their work. Rather, it is how they *live*, as Josie reflected.

Cheraye, MaLeah, and Cassandra each talked about schooling experiences that felt like they aligned with this pedagogical approach, but also described their hopes for

more connected schooling spaces. In their school, there were teachers who would engage in topics like perseverance and resilience, providing affirmations to students. But it wasn't the content that stood out most to MaLeah. "I just hope someone's just like, real positive, you know? And even if they're having a bad day, they're still gonna give those kids a good class" (MaLeah, personal communication, July 20, 2023). Cassandra shared,

I think a lot of my teachers during my middle school years took the time and effort to get to know them [students] and ask what was wrong, like, 'What can we do to help you move forward?'...I would say my middle school teachers really did take the time to know almost all their students and that's probably why [those are] some of my favorite years just because I felt like everybody felt cared about. They felt like their teachers stood behind them and that they would be there for them.

(Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023)

Cheraye, on the other hand, spoke about an experience she wished she would have had while preparing for college. "I wish someone would have said that it's ok to not know and it's ok to not really have a plan...you know that, like, whatever does go through, it's gonna be ok in the end" (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023). In each of these formative memories and hopes, Cheraye, Cassandra, and MaLeah each shared about a common desire: to have teachers (and adults in schools) take the time to show care, support, and kindness. The teacher they collectively imagined is someone who notices young peoples' pain and puts forth the effort to check-in even when they, themselves, are having a tough day. While this might not seem like a terribly high bar for educators, the fact that each of these students expressed feeling abandoned, forgotten, and ignored in the previous chapter speaks to the necessity to name their hoped-for reality.

This type of care is rooted in the protective responsibility of adults who work with young people that was characterized by others earlier in this chapter: the auntie-like, older-sibling form of nurturing that Josie and Carm talked about. It requires a proximity to young peoples' emotions and an ability to read their unspoken languages. It also requires adults to create the mental and emotional space to support both their own needs and those of their students. In many education spaces, this is perceived as an either/or scenario, where teachers must put themselves second in order to become martyrs or where they put themselves first in order to "fill their own cup." The conceptualization of protective care expressed here, however, is rooted in humanizing connection that necessitates a mindset of abundance—there is enough time and enough space for all of us.

Sometimes, the educator in this epistemically disobedient frame is required to take risks to protect students from harmful forces, policies, and/or people, however this isn't seen as a sacrifice. It is, instead, a responsibility. Or perhaps, more accurately, it is just what needs to be done sometimes. There is no glamor, status, or pat-on-the back. Fighting for young people when it is required is simply perceived as one part of the responsibilities of being an adult. In reference to the Critical Race Theory ban in South Dakota, Tara shared about the response from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and the resolution they developed as a response to the State. The resolution offered protection to teachers in public schools by exerting their Tribal sovereignty. More broadly, Tara expounded upon the nature of protection spaces. "Obviously in community spaces where learning is happening, there's just...that space is protected from some of that because it is created and designed and created and held by community members who are either explicitly or implicitly just creating the protection by ignoring or saying, 'Actually we are not gonna

allow that to influence the space” (Tara, personal communication, October 5, 2023).

When I asked her to elaborate on where the mentality of refusal comes from, as opposed to a mentality of compliance amongst educators, she replied, “What I’ve witnessed in my really small micro lens is that there’s...some folks who have gone through the education system and been harmed by it. And so as a result are like, ‘Actually this cannot happen. Therefore, I will commit to protecting, regardless of my exposure to risk” (Tara, personal communication, October 5, 2023). Essentially, Tara and others described a refusal to allow harm, a commitment to protecting, and a sense of ethical responsibility that is (or should be) held by adults in their relationships with young people.

Carm, an educator with whom I have worked for a long time, shared about her own experiences with refusals and protective care as a classroom teacher. In her first year of teaching, she had multiple experiences with school administration and systems that frustrated her and felt disconnected from students and their families. Carm, as a teacher, perceived herself not as the savior of her students, but as part of a broader ecosystem of adults who cared deeply for the wellbeing of the young people in her care. In one conversation with a grandma, she learned that a student had lost an influential uncle who had instilled a great deal of pride in her sense of identity as a Lakota youth. That particular day, something happened in the school that was triggering for the student and related to the loss of her uncle. Carm felt that administration was more focused on the student following the rules than showing compassion and understanding for the student’s experiences. Carm contacted the student’s grandma to share what had happened with the student that day, but not through the lens of holding the student “accountable” to her

actions. Rather, it was for the purpose of ensuring the young person's ecosystem of adults were equipped with the information they needed to protect the student. She reflected

But I just wanted the grandma to know that her kid was hurt by an adult and that's not ok. Like an adult shouldn't hurt kids like that emotionally. And I felt like it was really important that someone in her family, another adult witnessed that or knew about it at least and had the chance to vocalize like that's not ok to do to my child, my grandchild. You hurt her emotionally...And I was just there to be the middle person of bringing this together with the source of the issue to, like, who was crying and scared and just hurt. (Carm, personal communication, May 25, 2023)

I remember this event from the perspective of Carm's coach. I walked into the school that day for a classroom observation and her energy was heavy. The students did not seem to notice, as they worked on their "I am from" poems. The classroom space was bright, with a large, colorful carpet and yellow walls. Around the room were pennants of different higher education institutions and posters of Lakota language vocabulary. To enter this space was to feel like I had walked into a room designed with deep intentionality and a reflection of the complexity of students' identities. As students worked, Carm and I visited about the incident described above. Carm's sense of responsibility to the student did not stem from pity or a desire to save the student. In fact, I would argue that in many schools approaches to "saving" young people often result in systemic hyperfixation on student accountability and consequences (like sending kids to detention for not finishing their homework as described earlier). Her sense of responsibility, instead, originated from a commitment to community and her perception

of herself as a relative to her students—with all of the obligations and requirements that entailed. And this echoes in her classroom interactions across the board. When I enter her class in my role with my current employer, she will often send students to share their projects or work with me. “Go show Tuwin [Auntie],” she will say. Students will speak to me primarily in Lakota, despite my very limited understanding of the language, because that is the language of relatives in that space. Every adult there is tasked, by virtue of being present, with treating students as a niece or nephew. The students know this and have come to expect it. This is a fundamental shift in the perception of the role of the teacher within schooling spaces that was echoed by many research participants in different ways. Across conversations, themes of protection and responsibility stood out as clear markers of the possible, hopeful future that participants envisioned. Kat shared,

But it’s the impact on my vision and possibility of like, this, the social studies standards has now made, has added to the hostility and violence of this world that we’re sending young people into. And it’s a consistent reminder to what young people are *owed* by me and people who work in organizations like me that like, we owe them everything because this is the world we’ve set up for them. (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023)

### ***Cultivating Community and Belonging***

In South Dakota, contemporary and historical education policies have acted as vehicles intended to separate young people from themselves, their families, and their broader communities. Today, state actions like the social studies standards, CRT bans, anti-trans legislation, and the state’s evasion of its responsibilities to Indigenous young people continue to propel a dangerous narrative about Indigenous peoples, specifically,

and youth, more broadly. In such an environment, where hostility and violence are deeply felt and experienced by Indigenous young people and the adults who love and care for them, the act of imagining and creating spaces of belonging, wellness, connection, and community becomes an act of resistance to hegemony. Belonging, in some instances, was demonstrated by students feeling as if they could speak freely about things that were important to them (like in Cheraye's vision of education) or, in other instances, by students being unafraid to speak their Indigenous language, regardless of their fluency, because they knew it was safe to try (like in Carm's classroom). Connection was demonstrated through the recognition of each other as relatives (like in Josie's relationships with her former students). Together, these tenets form the root of relationality and are a powerful force in challenging the isolation and abandonment that is currently attempted via state policies.

The young people with whom I visited for this research were already aware of this. They viewed their responsibilities to their community through a lens of love and the care they seek for themselves. Cheraye, who was applying for an internship with a Tribal community development corporation when we visited, shared, "One of the reasons I want to do the Seven Gen internship is because I still want to make that connection with my people, and I still want to build those relationships as I'm in school. So, I want to like, also be more engaged with the community as I'm building my career" (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023). Cassandra reflected on her time in school, specifically on her relationships with her peers. "I really love my school district a lot. I love how it's like a tight knit community. I love that all my peers and I are still connected and love the support that each of us gave each other" (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4,

2023). MaLeah similarly reflected on classroom experiences that helped her connect with her peers. She recalled a teacher, Miss Petrie, who would take time at the beginning of class every once in a while, to engage students in icebreaker activities, which provided her with an opportunity to get to know other students who she didn't know as well or talk to in her day-to-day student experience. I asked Cassandra about the teachers with whom she connected in her middle school years and what she thought they had in common with one another.

I guess one thing that they have all in common is that, speaking from my own experiences, I had a relationship with every single one. I would say they were just tired of seeing their students settle for what was given to them. And I felt like they were. I feel like they really wanted us to be the best, they wanted us to progress and move forward instead of just settle and stay in one place. But I guess just one huge characteristic that I noticed is I have a relationship with each of them. I was close with them. I just had a connection there. I felt like I could confide in them and they just didn't turn a blind eye to what was in front of them, what was visible to everybody. And I think that was really nice. As I moved forward to high school and I seen that, I felt like a lot of people just turned a blind eye and was like, 'Oh, you know, that's just the way it's always been so that's how it's going to be'.

(Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023)

Cassandra, like many students, noticed that there were teachers who made her feel like she belonged in the classroom and there were teachers who didn't. There were adults in the school building who would see students for who they were in that space and

accept them while still setting high expectations. Cheraye reflected on middle school and the sense of community she had there and how that had shifted over time.

I wish there's a better sense of community within the schools. I just feel like community is important, especially to kids, especially to Indigenous kids.

Community is really important and I wish we had more of that outside of school. I really liked when the middle school had their little cookouts for their parent-teacher nights. Everyone would just be, like, we'd be playing volleyball in the field, and we'd be talking to teachers outside of the academic setting. Like, that was cool. And that was nice. I liked them when they did that. They just don't really do it anymore. (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023)

Whether through the lens of peer-to-peer connection or connecting with the adults in the building, each of the young people with whom I visited expressed a deep desire for school to be a space where they feel a sense of community and belonging. It is important to note that they did not refer to connection simply as something that would be nice to have. It was expressed, instead, as a necessity. Cheraye spoke about the experience she wants her younger siblings to have in school. She worries about their futures and the path that has been laid out for them if nothing changes in schools. Another thing that stood out in our conversations, however, was that these former students did not necessarily imagine relationships as incredibly intense. Rather, the characteristics they described encompassed a casual, community-like relationship. A space where people know one another and care about each other's well-being; an environment where adults look out for young people and students are looking out for each other. MaLeah recommended a club for students who might just need a friend during the day or a class where students learn

about acceptance and kindness. She wants her son to grow up in a school environment where he learns to accept “all kinds of people” and where he is accepted as well. While she plans to send him to the local private culture-based school, Wakanyeja Ki Tokeyahci, she is already thinking ahead to the experience she wants him to have as he gets older and ages out of that program. After her suggestion about offering an acceptance class, she amended her statement to reflect that what she was looking for in her son’s education experience was more of a feeling than a particular course or curricular content. This feeling, characterized by connectedness and openness was reflected in her experiences in her CNA courses. She enjoys spending time with her peers and other people in her profession. “It’s just like hanging out with people in your career is like the most exciting thing, you know? Like the way you relate on stuff. Because I went to clinicals and I was like, ‘Wow, this is so fun!’ Like I didn’t even care if I’m lifting or doing anything because it was just fun to be around people that knew what was going on. Yeah, it was energizing actually” (MaLeah, personal communication, July 20, 2023).

Tate has children in both the public and BIE schools on Rosebud. She also wants her kids to learn to be accepting of other people and to have a vast understanding of the complexity and variance of Indigenous identity. She reflected on her own experience, explored in the previous chapter, where she felt like she was not asked to pray publicly because of her religious affiliation, regardless of her Indigeneity. There can sometimes be a sense that there is a “right” and a “wrong” way to be Indigenous and she does not want her kids to internalize those perspectives. “Our kids need to just see different, because they’re going to see that when they go out, and they need to see different people, different types of prayer” (Tate, personal communication, September 8, 2023). She imagines a

future for South Dakota where “...every child in the state of South Dakota [is] a friend of a Lakota person because we’re everywhere, you know? And that, that is my hope for the state is that we can become one people” (Tate, personal communication, September 8, 2023).

Tara expressed a connected and yet different vision for community and belonging in schools where young people are connected to their broader community and are learning alongside community members. She defined a future of education where schools are “anchored to youth feeling a sense of belonging, feeling a sense of connection, feeling a sense of sturdiness in their identity, in their understanding of who they are in relationship to community and more broadly” (Tara, personal communication, October 5, 2023). In this sense, connectedness and belonging extend beyond vehicles for academic success. Much like Cheraye, Cassandra, MaLeah, and Tate, Tara is able to picture a far-reaching sense of belonging, a sense of being held by community, cared for and connected to people inside and outside of the building, as a cornerstone of education in its own right.

### ***Critical Self Reflection***

Because protective care and cultivating community and belonging are perceived responsibilities and necessities, it also requires that educators and other adults who work with young people are consistently self-reflecting and evaluating their own beliefs, biases, and actions towards creating this reality. When asked to define what teachers should be doing in classrooms in order to provide an education rooted in care for students, Dan shared

Really confronting and interrogating their own biases that may not be apparent or that may not have been ever really addressed or called out in previous generations. I think now more than ever people are challenged to actively look at things...even that conversation has required that these teachers acknowledge the sovereignty of the tribe and the value and inherent power of the culture that they work in and the strong things about the family that kids come with. And I think a shift to asset-based thinking also requires you to challenge why you were approaching things with a negative view in the first point and in the first place. So...let's say interrogating your own cultures and underlying biases that affect the way that you operate in a classroom or school setting. (Dan, personal communication, September 28, 2023)

As someone who trains educators, Dan prioritizes ensuring that his teachers, specifically non-Native teachers, are working through their own biases and the feelings they have about Indigenous students that are likely developed through the damaging state narrative about Indigenous peoples in South Dakota. Aimee and Kat, who also work with teachers, reiterated the importance of this practice. Aimee focuses on helping teachers identify the areas in which they need to grow, particularly when those teachers develop problematic attitudes towards students and families. "Don't feel like the behavior is going to be a problem forever. Learn to love your students first" (Aimee, personal communication, October 18, 2023). Aimee's vision of education requires that all teachers believe that every student can learn. This requires that every teacher is able to see the assets, strengths, and gifts of each student, not just the ones who are "high-achieving." Kat's approach to teacher development also revolves around critical self-reflection,

however she leans on her own reflections to define her sense of possibility. “I was doing a lot of reflecting on my own schooling experience. And I would say the majority of my schooling experience from K all the way up through 12 was the world inside the classroom was severely disconnected to the world outside for me. So in many ways, it was like trying to offer students a type of learning that was never offered to me” (Kat, Personal Communication, September 5, 2023).

The anchor of critical self-reflection in relational spaces is a desire to do right by students and to ensure that they are getting what they deserve from their education. To root in relational pedagogies, to root in protective care, educators and other adults who work with young people must consistently be considering the ways that our behaviors can cause harm or disconnection.

In general, relational pedagogy and protective care act as vehicles by which participants in this study conceptualized a world that is separated from the isolation and social hierarchies that are required under coloniality. Simultaneously, the end-goal of this type of education is separate from typical conceptualizations of academic achievement. While “academic success” might be a necessity for some of the priorities outlined in this section, it was certainly not a central focus or even a topic mentioned by participants in the time we visited with one another. The purpose of relational pedagogy, according to these participants, is simply to be in community with one another, to take care of one another, and to learn the skills and beliefs necessary to continue to make the world an easier place within which to live.

**“People are Fed Up”: Resistance and Advocacy**

“The state’s apathy and evasion of responsibility for Indigenous students in general also fueled my desire to step out and rage against the machine” (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023). Sarah, who has served in a number of roles in Indigenous education in South Dakota formed her own non-profit organization in early 2022 that is solely dedicated to improving the educational experiences and climate for Indigenous students in the state. I was able to work with her in a few different capacities over the course of several years. Her focus on organizing people across different organizations and across the political spectrum has led to large-scale protests, equipping parents and students to provide testimony at public hearings and legislative sessions, and a statewide base-building campaign. As we sit at the kitchen counter in the office space she uses for her work, she speaks about revolutionaries as if she does not realize she, herself, is one. “And so you get the revolutionaries who step outside the box with no funding and no resources to make a way. And that, that breeds self-determination and self-sufficiency because then, then you’re seeking out ways to resource and fund things that, you know, could be really powerful and impactful” (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

Across participants and across the state, individuals and groups are building their strength and collective power in an effort to resist state hegemony. The concept of epistemic disobedience, while it may not be the exact term used by individuals in such spaces, is a clear and consistent thread. In the conversations I had with participants, there was a common theme of, “We’re just going to do this anyway.” This mentality, whether it was held by participants themselves or something they notice or want to instill in others, centers a delegitimizing of state power. By refusing to acknowledge or accept the policies, rules, and overall attitude of the state towards Indigenous education, participants

simultaneously create a pathway toward a different possible reality. They choose not to accept the state's authority and control. Certainly, there was a broad understanding amongst them that the state is a powerful force, but that didn't seem to deter any of them from continuing to advocate loudly and boldly in almost every space they are in. I attended a protest with Sarah in September of 2021, right after the new social studies standards had been released and before public hearings about them had commenced. When we reached the state house, she got on a microphone, faced television cameras, and called for the resignation of the Director of Indian Education (Fred Osborn), the Secretary of Tribal Relations (Dave Flute), The then-Secretary of Education (Tiffany Sanderson) and the Governor (Kristi Noem). Sarah knows that these are powerful people with a lot of political backing in South Dakota. She knows that she is fighting an uphill battle. And she does it anyway. In fact, multiple participants recognized the type of grassroots Indigenous organizing efforts, like Sarah's, as huge wins for Indigenous education in recent years. Judith shared,

I think that's something else that is going well is the fact that there are many initiatives that are starting and they are given a certain amount of flexibility to operate in the way that they're meant to and kind of see what happens...there's this realization of the current system is not serving our people and our young people in particular. So we are willing to try new things and learn from whatever the outcome is. (Judith, personal communication, November 16, 2023)

Furthermore, Kat stated, "I think what's going really well is sort of like tangible you know, this grassroots movement which I think has existed for like hundreds of years of

people pushing back on Western or colonial forms of schooling and Western and colonial understandings of education” (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023).

In a number of spaces across the state, Indigenous women (primarily, although not exclusively) are taking on the role of vocal advocate, usually in white male-dominated spaces. They hold systems accountable and develop creative ways to challenge existing norms. Their thinking is not bound by the limitations of state policy. Their stance seems to stem from a rootedness in the relational pedagogy described in the previous section, however the manifestations of that stance look different, partially due to positionality and roles.

As people embody a pedagogy of advocacy and resistance, they work to carve out pathways to equity, ensuring that their voices are represented and heard in state-level policy spaces, and creating opportunities where they didn’t previously exist. These educators are characterized by a sense of connection to one another, rooted in a community-organizing orientation. And perhaps most poignantly, when they are told “no” or when a policy seems to act as a barrier, they do their work anyway. Sarah reflected on the creation of pathways. “And now coming into an era of cultural safety where I have developed a little more emotional intelligence and cognizance of what’s happening, that I’m just like, ‘No. We’re not tolerating this anymore.’ And creating a pathway for opportunity to exist where it doesn’t” (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023). April, who works with educators and has held a number of roles in education spaces over the years, also reflected on her sense of “do it anyway.” She shared,

The amount of harm that has been caused to our Indigenous community by this system, like, we don’t wanna do that anymore. And I kind of see that with a lot of

different programs. So in the schools, which is like, ‘We don’t want to just be like a class anymore. That’s not enough. We don’t wanna just a photo of culture...In school leadership and teachers and immersion programs, despite policies not supporting this shift, there’s so many brilliant minds that are just like, ‘We’re just gonna do it with no funding and limited support from the State’. (April, personal communication, July 19, 2023).

Frustrated, but not deterred, by state barriers to their work, these individuals continue to imagine, create, and utilize pathways to self-determination by navigating state spaces with intentionality. Several Tribal Education Directors, for example, have been part of developing Tribal teacher certification programs, which will allow the Tribe to certify teachers and bypass state policy. This creates an opportunity for community-defined priorities and practices to be central in the teacher certification process. Jane, who was able to share spaces with state officials for a number of years, reflected on the ways in which the Tribal Education Directors have exercised their sovereignty with the state by relying on policy, rather than by allowing it to become a barrier.

They just kept pushing and they kept using policy from what I can understand, using policy to support and get her to jump on board...It was an interesting space to, for the Tribal Education Directors to be sharing a space with the Secretary of Education because TEDs are like the secretaries of education for their Tribes. So there is that alignment there and Tribes don’t have to answer to States. (Jane, personal communication, October 24, 2023)

Jane also spoke to the importance of organized people advocating for a common goal in spaces where positional power historically has kept them out.

And so they [Tribal Education Directors] worked on a collective statement and report and then asked around about changing the [funding] formulas because they haven't been changed. It was interesting to be fully funded under appropriations by policy that a lot of the programs, especially through BIE have never been fully funded since, since it ever existed and came into play. That was amazing to know that they were heard in Congress and were giving a statement and I was telling them, I hope you guys understand how powerful that is to organized Tribal Education Directors. And then they took, I think it's the ACLU, to the United Nations, a statement from the Tribal Education Directors. And so they have had their voice and the issues and what they are asking for and the treatment of our native students around equity have been at the national level and the international level. And I don't think many people know that that's happened. Of course, they're not gonna say, but it's been very powerful how these directors can organize themselves collectively. (Jane, personal communication, October 23, 2024)

Her reflections articulated a role for Tribal leadership that stands firmly in Tribal sovereignty and, in some cases, entirely bypasses state authority. This type of agency and advocacy requires a capacity and vision for Indigenous education that does not center the role of the state or the perceived authority of state offices. It also requires connection with others and resisting the loneliness and isolation that can sometimes come alongside such fights. Kat shared about how the passing of the state social studies standards impacted her reality and her vision, but also on her connections with others who do similar work

It's like a very deep sort of philosophical possibility stance. A reminder that, yeah South Dakota is really really [messed] up. Here's just another reason it's really [messed] up. This is why I get up in the morning. This is what I push other people to do and remind other people of. This is like my go-to example for when folks want to tell me it's not that hostile or violent. Which I don't actually experience often anymore. I think for the most part, most of the people I work with know and believe in the hostility and see it. (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023)

Kat continued to discuss the affirmation and energy that come from working alongside individuals who see the barriers that the state attempts to put in front of students. Nora also shared about the need she sees to further support the work of those who are advocating for students. Specifically, she hopes there can be a structure in place to support the Tribal Education Directors. Her work with a local education organization has provided fellows through an organizational fellowship to add capacity to different organizations fighting for Indigenous education, but she hopes to see more collaboration and involvement with several organizations. One of the ideas she shared with me was to develop a Lakota Policy Department at the Tribal College or another space where resources could go towards developing and analyzing policies at the Tribal and state levels.

While participants reflected on the roles of Tribal leaders and their organizations, they (and other participants not yet named here) also had very clear visions for the roles of teachers and schools in advocacy efforts. This type of advocacy, however, was less about approaching state and even international policymaking, and more focused on how

educators can and should advocate on behalf of their students. Often, this overlapped with a similar “Do it anyway” mentality that students and other participants hoped to see teachers embrace. Cheraye recalled her coursework where she felt like her teachers supported her in developing her own critique of systems and state violence. “I feel like you guys were the ones that talked the most about controversial things. I wrote a paper on abortion in eighth grade with Miss Bailey and she was like, no matter what her viewpoints were on it, she was helping me with it, you know? That’s cool” (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023). Cheraye continued to share about how her ability to trust her teachers was connected to whether she could talk about controversial things with them and whether or not she felt the “vibe” that they would have her back. When I asked her to describe the characteristics of those people and the energy that they bring with them, she said “open minded, woke, and transparent.” Interestingly, she connected the concept of transparency from her teachers with their tendencies to be advocates. “I feel like teachers who are just open and honest...who are very much advocates for anything and everything. Whether that’s LGBTQ, whether that’s ableism, what that’s anything. Whenever they’re advocates for whatever...You can definitely, like, that’s the vibe” (Cheraye, personal communication, April 4, 2023). Similarly, Cassandra connected advocacy to strong relationships with her teachers, noting “I really don’t know what else to say but, I just know that all the teachers that were advocating for their students had a strong relationship with them and, just really didn’t want them to settle, like, at all” (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023). Her dad, who works in the high school she attended, also played a major role in advocating for her when she needed support.

I'm just thinking about how fortunate I am to have that. But also, I think about my other peers who have problems with teachers and they can't just run to their parent that works in the district...And honestly, I've noticed that I've had multiple forms of advocacy. My middle school years, I had multiple teachers as well who were an advocacy person...And I think in high school it just became my dad. I'm very grateful to have some form of advocacy throughout my whole K through 12. I think that really helped play a role too in how confident I felt in asking for help and looking for support as well. (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023)

In a number of instances, participants connected the concept of advocacy on behalf of students with both pushing back on policies or mandates and supporting students in developing their own critiques of the world around them.

I like when teachers voice their opinions. Like, 'No, actually, I don't want to do this. I feel like there's a better way to do this. A more effective way.' I like when teachers really put their opinion on what they think their students need because nobody knows their students more well, hopefully, than a teacher in their classroom, right? (Cassandra, personal communication, May 4, 2023)

Cheraye named that she wanted teachers to be comfortable supporting her in her own advocacy efforts and in developing a critique of the world. "I feel like an important experience was like, criticizing the education system as it is because it should be criticized" (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023).

Similarly, teachers and teacher educators with whom I spoke framed up a sense of responsibility around both teaching students to critique systems and acting as advocates

for their students. Dan discussed how equipping educators to challenge dominant narratives about education that get passed down from the state is a key indicator of success for students at the college where he works. He also talked about the importance of educators knowing “where they stand on things and what they’re willing to fight for” when they leave the teacher education program at the Tribal college.

So by the time that they are teaching, I would say almost every student teacher that I’ve worked with in the past five years, I think all of them are ready to fight for what they see is that noble cause teaching real history that happened. That is, from an Indigenous point of view, from a Lakota point of view, and centering that. Or at least giving it a lot more space than I think politicians in South Dakota would like. I think they’re ready and willing to do that. So when it comes to the social studies standards, they are far more likely than the students coming out of other places to have a critique of American history that is normally taught and they’re more likely to say, ‘Actually, Tribal sovereignty is important. It’s a thing. And if...the Tribe is saying we’re gonna teach it, then that is important and we’re going to do it.’ And for the Native teachers, most of them are local teachers. I feel like they are some of the thought leaders in this and they’re aggressive and have strong opinions about challenging those ideas now. They may not always know the means with which to do it, but in their classrooms, they’re more than ready, especially if they’re given the tools and support to do it. (Dan, personal communication, September 28, 2023)

Aimee, who also works at a college, similarly prioritized the ability of educators to think critically and creatively about what they are asked to do by the state. Her hope was that

educators will be able to use policies like the state social studies standards as a vehicle by which they exercise their agency. “I want them to be able to go into a school where that is a focus and say, ‘Ok, here’s what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna take the standards, but I’m going to make them better. I’m going to expect more out of my students. I’m going to teach above and beyond what is listed here.’” (Aimee, personal communication, October 18, 2023). Additionally, Aimee felt strongly about the “savior” mentality versus “advocate” mentality and the necessity to work to build the latter in participants of their teacher education program. “I think there’s definitely a difference because I think if you’re an advocate for students, you’re putting their needs first. I think if you have that other mentality, you’re putting yourself first.” (Aimee, personal communication, October 18, 2023).

The role of the advocate, as articulated by participants, is multifaceted. It requires prioritizing voice and representation of students across spaces as well as clarity around the ways policies sometimes work against student interests. The advocate resists state policies that they know are harmful by embracing a mentality of “Do it anyway,” that stems from rage at the inequities that currently encompass education as a system. They are creative in their maladjustments to hegemony and embrace critique. They work to pave pathways to representation and create opportunities where they didn’t exist before. As Sarah stated,

I think stepping into the role of advocate for, as a former reservation-dwelling student, to then advocate for urban-dwelling Native students who are struggling so hard to find their identity in the world, both culturally and as a human being, and then seeing their lack of support and resources or cultural affirmations that

they don't have access to and that they, in a country that we come from, we should have affirming factors everywhere and we should be able to have access...so I don't take it lightly when given an opportunity to sit at a historically white-dominated space where I'm able to use a very constructively critical voice to create more representation where it hadn't been. (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023)

**“It's not just self-determination. You're also determining with everyone else”:**

### **Sustenance and Community Perpetuity**

April spoke in multiple ways about how the state has always been unable to imagine a world where Indigenous people educated their own people. In combination with the historical attempted genocide carried out by the U.S. government in different ways at different times, it is reasonable to say that the government never imagined a world where Indigenous peoples would continue to exist at all. Indigenous futures were never part of the plan for this country. Given that, to continue to plan for the thriving of future generations, to actively imagine Indigenous futures, to develop strategies aligned with community sustenance and perpetuity are acts of epistemic delinking and disobedience.

Central to this epistemic frame is the concept of responsiveness. In a community-responsive relationship, needs, goals, and solutions are designed by a community, which participants defined broadly. The role of the state in this relationship is to provide resources and infrastructure under the guidance, supervision, and request of Tribal nations.

Give them the resources, give them the infrastructure that they say they need and, I think it's definitely their responsibility, but I also think it's not their responsibility to decide exactly what that looks like. I think that's the difference between sovereignty and not necessarily Tribal sovereignty, just sovereignty in general. Education sovereignty, food sovereignty. What does that community need and, therefore, how can we get it set up so that they can get that? (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023)

Josie's perspective here is rooted in a vision of resource-sharing that delegitimizes a top-down approach to development and, instead, emphasizes a lateral relationship between communities and the state. Other participants articulated something similar. In this relationship, the abundance of resources that exists is spread out according to need, rather than according to a capitalist "supply and demand" approach that prioritizes profit. In addition, however, goals and priorities are also defined by and enacted by members of each community, whether that is in regard to the purposes of educating young people or determining who is equipped to educate them. I asked Josie how she imagines her role in the work of rejecting and redefining policies like certification and standards. Her focus was primarily on acting as someone who holds space, shares resources and access to the things she has access to given her role, and supporting the development of shared ideas about education. "So I see a role in making sure that, that definition is rooted in who it is that is gonna be in community with who, who is the community that we're starting with that can actually define some of those definitions needed?" (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023).

Josie's work and how she defines her role, through the lens of caregiver, has always centered sustenance. I have worked alongside her for nearly a decade at this point and have been able to experience the ways in which she pushes, challenges, and rejects. She utilizes her role to hold powerful systems and people accountable, but also to cultivate an educational movement that is purposed around creating the conditions for community self-determination. She speaks with a sense of abundance, hope, and care that is unique and grounding. She makes no assumptions that the work of community self-determination is easy or straightforward, but she also seems to inherently believe in the fact that it is possible. To visit with her is to feel rooted in my own creativity and connectedness. Her vision of sustenance is connected to protection and navigating a hostile world.

I had a cousin who said something about how being Native, like entering any space is intimidating for somebody because being a Native person represents a power, represents a time before power imbalance existed. And that connected to me in thinking about, like, we all have our own spirits, our own nagis before power imbalance existed. And the role now is, has always been, to protect that. To protect the dignity of that. But the threats, I think, today just look very different than they did precolonially. And they're a little more sneaky or strategic and require something different that I don't think we've figured out. (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023)

Participants framed the notion of sustenance and community perpetuity both as a connection to the past and, simultaneously, as planning and preparing for the future. There was a sense of responsibility to both ancestors and to future generations that were

equally as crucial to sustaining cultural practices, languages, and worldviews, but always through the lens of community needs and hopes. Cheraye, for example, shared, “I just really want my siblings and all of the younger generations to know how hard our ancestors worked to keep this culture alive. And I want them to work just as hard to continue to keep it alive” (Cheraye, personal communication, April 14, 2023). Her hopes for education connected community responsiveness with perpetuity, resurgence, and revitalization. She felt frustrated that her educational experience did not necessarily center *why* it was important for her to learn the language and felt caught off-guard when she went to college out of state and began talking about endangered languages. Also connected to ancestral ways of learning and knowing, Dan shared a hope for educators to ground their practices in pre-colonial teaching approaches and values that were true in Indigenous cultures here in South Dakota and across the United States. He shared,

We have seen so much of modern psychology and modern education come around to certain aspects of it and say, ‘oh, actually this is really important.’ Like the idea of students working in community instead of competition. A really basic thing. Competition is such a natural tool that teachers use...and then the more recent things about collaborative learning. There's so many benefits and people are like, ‘oh this is actually a healthy way to teach’ but it’s really just a mirror of some pre-colonial teaching styles. (Dan, personal communication, September 28, 2023)

This was echoed in Aimee’s sentiments regarding student-centered learning and connecting teaching and learning to Lakota values. Further, Tate expanded on the necessity and responsibility for educators to be working to embody cultural values and in their teaching practices. She wants her sons to learn the language, to learn how to respect

and engage in cultural protocols, and to learn to be good relatives to everyone around them. For non-Indigenous teachers, this is often framed through the lens of listening to community voices, respecting the opinions and perspectives of students' parents and families, and teaching in a way that honors past and present struggles for sovereignty. Whether this means supporting students in developing their critiques of the world around them, or engaging students in conversations (and actions) related to the No DAPL movement, participants had clear examples of how Native and non-Native educators alike have a role to play in ensuring that education creates pathways to Tribal sustenance and the continuation of Tribal communities. April shared how this work can sometimes be complicated for educators.

And then everyone says, 'Oh your ancestors passed away because of this for you to be here for you to continue this way of life' but yet, I do have to work through all of that. I think that's a motivation of not wanting our children to carry that burden. We at least want them to have a foundation. I think growing up there was just constantly like, 'You need to know your language, you need to preserve the culture.' But then there was also shame around that. But I think that's the drive and motivation is like, we learned how to navigate the system and now we don't want to navigate it anymore. (April, personal communication, July 19, 2023)

April's vision articulates a necessity for education to be centered in ways that remove the burden of having to navigate the current educational (and political) system. This resists the common "learn how to play the game so you can beat it" narrative that is frequently a shared sentiment amongst educators with whom I have worked. Rather, April and others are communicating something entirely different: a community-sustained approach to

education that is affirming, caring, nurturing, and completely decentered from Western educational purposes and goals. It is an educational practice and theory that is rooted, like Josie shared, in community values, goals, and purposes, and that always emphasizes community continuance.

When Kat was a classroom teacher, she engaged her students in a project on the Keystone XL pipeline. I asked her what motivated her to take on this topic, as someone who was not originally from the community where she was teaching. She shared that her focus was on equipping students to become advocates for themselves, but also to emphasize traditional relationships with land and how to assert those in present-day situations. She said she had hoped to

Help them understand, I think, what they would be up against for the rest of their lives. Help them understand their responsibility to land because our pipeline unit wasn't just about the effects of the pipeline. It was also like, why is it so important to take care of land? Why is your orientation to land, as a Lakota person, different than perhaps other people like me and how I was raised?" (Kat, personal communication, September 5, 2023)

She also shared that a focus of her teaching was to ensure that the content always connected to what students were experiencing outside of the classroom. While this is not a particularly new stance on educational purpose and goals, her rationale is distinct from the common approach to and assumptions about "real world" education. Rather than preparing students to compete in a global economy, the emphasis of Kat and other participants' approaches to teaching and learning is to define "relevance" and "real world" through the lens of equipping students to be good relatives, to be caretakers of the

land, and to become Elders. As Nora shared, “They are arming, preparing students in the best possible way to be critical, contributing, inquisitive future citizens of a nation, including their Tribal nations as well as the U.S. (Nora, personal communication, October 23, 2023). Carm, on the other hand, recalled a moment where she realized that, as an educator, she had the autonomy to utilize her classroom time in service of a Tribal future. “And they had presented so many lessons that they do on the land, the language, sovereignty, treaties, song, dance. And I was like, wow I didn’t know that’s what teaching was about” (Carm, personal communication, May 25, 2023). Carm now works as an immersion teacher. MaLeah, a former student, plans to send her son to that school. She wants him to be immersed in Lakota language, but also to develop an understanding of who he is in relation to his community. She recalled her own experience with Lakota language learning in school and her hope that schools will start language instruction earlier. She believes that rather than beginning language learning (in the public school system) in middle school, elementary students would be capable of learning language as well, even if it seems more difficult to approach at that grade level. “Yeah, maybe when you’re in elementary, you know? Teaching kids Lakota, even basic Lakota. I took Lakota class and it was just basic Lakota and I feel like kids can learn that too, you know? I mean, sometimes it’s really hard to get all the stuff but it’s fine” (MaLeah, personal communication, July 20, 2023). MaLeah’s long-term goal is to become a nurse, help her people, and live in a house with her son.

Most participants did not reference test scores as a focal point. While they did articulate a clear desire for students to be equipped and prepared to navigate the world, their vision of this extended beyond academic preparedness. Certainly, there was an

undercurrent of wanting students to be able to read, write, and do math. But participants were more focused on equipping students with the additional skills needed to continue to lead their communities into an Indigenous future.

If you would have asked me this 15 years ago, I would have wanted every child to go to college and get a degree...my heart has shifted a little bit. I hope that they get a quality high school education. You know, at least that to where they can go out and survive in the world. But also to just be a good relative regardless. You know what I mean? Because I think kindness can carry us further than our education, and I can be the most educated person but if I don't have a good heart, I'm not making a difference in the world. So I hope that all my kids take these little lessons throughout their 12 years of early childhood education or whatever we call it. But just hope that they find their passion, whether it's going to school, whether it's going to trade school, whether it's working at our local restaurant, working in our local gas station. Because those people, we don't value them enough. (Tate, personal communication, September 8, 2023)

What Tate is expressing here and continued to share as we visited, is a desire to live in a world where everyone feels, and is, highly valued for who they are. She wants the students she teaches, and her own kids, to excel academically by state metrics, but her purpose and goals extend far beyond state-defined conceptualizations of success. In some spaces, this might be referred to as “socioemotional wellness” or something along those lines, but her vision is actually connected to the future of the Tribal nation. She sees the ability to be good relatives as a requirement for the survival and regeneration of the Tribal nation. It is not “nice to have.” It is a necessity.

The work of “autonomously design[ing] something innovative and creative that yields impact” (Sarah, personal communication, June 1, 2023) that is focused on community needs, Tribal sovereignty, and long-term planning for an Indigenous future, requires strategy. Both Jane and Judith talked about how this particular work, the work of exercising sovereignty and educating in a way that supports cultural continuance, requires them to sometimes operate “under the radar.” This makes sense, considering the hostility of the state and the historical approaches to genocide. It can feel frustrating or overwhelming to those engaging in this work, however strategizing is also a component of long-term planning for the continued existence and self-determination of the Tribe. Jane shared,

People start to know who you are and what you’re advocating for. I have to sit with myself sometimes and think about how much pushback do I want to give because I’m trying to get some stuff done and if I raise too much of a red flag, then the work that we’ve been doing for the last five years is not gonna go anywhere. So there’s places to be up front...I get more done when I’m under the radar and know that I have the committee, basically the Tribe’s support, but I’m under the radar. (Jane, personal communication, October 24, 2023)

She noted that even Tribal Education Directors must be cautious and strategic in how and what they say with the Department of Education. Judith, who taught in an elementary school on the Reservation, also shared about having to “fly under the radar” at times. While her school was incredibly supportive of language and cultural work in classrooms and she felt well-equipped as a non-Tribal member to take on the responsibility, she also noted that things would have likely been different if their work as a school had been

under more of a microscope by the state. For her, one of the benefits of the state's lack of interest in Indigenous education became the flexibility and autonomy that this afforded her in providing a culturally affirming and validating education to her students.

The notion of sustenance is complex and community-specific. It requires an orientation to the state that emphasizes accountability for providing resources, but without drawing their attention to much of anything else. At its core, however, the aggregate vision of sustenance and community perpetuity shared by participants was rooted in the simple reality of Indigenous communities designing and enacting the education (broadly defined) of Indigenous youth.

### **Conclusion**

As Mignolo (2011) points out, to engage in epistemic delinking and epistemic disobedience is not necessarily to create something new within a colonial world. Rather, it is rooted in an entirely different beginning. Over the course of visiting with research participants in the past year, they continually referred to a clear vision of education rooted in community self-determination. Their perspectives on self-determination, however, often existed outside of the dominant connotation of Tribal Self-Determination, as defined by federal policy, except in the instances where this shared vision required utilizing policy for strategic purposes. Their "beginning" was in the relational responsibility to protect young people from all harm. In its current iteration, this harm comes in the form of colonial, hegemonic state forces. While their visions of education might still connect with current state and federal governments, participants also articulated the ways in which they epistemically delegitimize state power in order to

drive forward an educational reality that is affirming, nurturing, and regenerating. As

Josie shared,

There's so much that's possible. There's no possible way that things could result in anything worse, on the whole, than where they're at and have been. That's what gets me out of bed because I also believe that there are moments in any given day, any given year, that defy anything we've ever learned before. (Josie, personal communication, March 14, 2023)

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

As a critical ethnography, this study was intended to research the ways in which individuals understand their roles within and navigate their relationships to hegemonic policy in the context of Indigenous education in a Reservation community. This approach was intended to respond to a call from Indigenous scholars to challenge dominant colonial educational practices and policies and to capture some of the thinking, framing, and experiences that take place in this work on a daily basis. In Chapter One, I framed the context of the problem, illuminating the tension between state-defined Tribal Self-Determination and a more holistic vision of community self-determination. In Chapter Two, I provided a more robust review of historical policies and the tensions they have created over time as well as how Indigenous scholars have responded to those tensions. Chapter Three provided an overview of the methodology applied in this study, including methods, purposes, and ethical considerations. In Chapters Four and Five, I shared the story of Indigenous education from the perspective of research participants, focusing first on their experiences with hegemony and how it plays out in their experiences “on the ground,” and then subsequently illuminating the ways in which participants engage in in the re-visioning, reclaiming, and renaming of educational realities for Indigenous students. In this chapter, I will respond to the different components of my research question by utilizing the findings from the previous two chapters. I will then provide recommendations for both future research and practice.

**Research Question Part One: What is the Relationship Between Tribal Self-Determination Policies and Enactments, Tribal-Serving Schools, and Tribal and Non-Tribal Education Stakeholders in South Dakota?**

When Tribal Self-Determination is considered through the lens of State and Federal policy, its relationship to schools and stakeholders is considerably different than the relationship between community self-determination and schools. Participants in this study articulated, overall, a distrust in the state and federal governments and their own experiences with government officials as being disinvested (at best) and malicious (at worst) in regards to Indigenous education in South Dakota. In that sense, state policies are frequently experienced by participants as furthered attempts to control Indigenous land, power, and identity. They experience state actors and their policies as thinly-veiled attempts to deprioritize Indigenous youth and promote, rather, a vision of Americanness that requires the relinquishing of Indigenous identity and land. The state does this through controlling access to resources and opportunities, limiting Indigenous representation in policies, cultivating fear and uncertainty, and protecting their own self-interest (often at the cost of the wellbeing of Indigenous communities). In this reality and in the shared experiences of participants, schools become the vehicles by which harmful policies are expected to be carried out and stakeholders become the drivers of those vehicles. Through this lens, policies create complex conditions whereby educators must navigate risk and vision. Individuals in schools (and making decisions about schools) often find themselves in precarious positions where they feel their jobs may be on the line if they do not comply with state policies. State policies, therefore, become threats. In this same scenario, however, Tribal policies that are developed in response to State policies can serve as a barrier to state harm, creating protection for those who feel threatened by the state, and establishing a protective shield to legal ramifications. This reflects what Patrice Kunesh (2022) asserts: “Tribal self-determination through self-governance is the only

policy that produces positive results.” The distinction between Tribal policies that exercise self-determination through self-governance and state policies that fall under the era or policy premise of the ISDEAA of 1975 is crucial in understanding the relationship between policies, enactments, and their implications for schools and stakeholders. Additionally, there are times where stakeholders utilize the federal and state policies to advance Tribal priorities. One example of this is by using federal policy to mandate that state and school entities engage in meaningful consultation with Tribes in order to ensure that Tribal priorities are represented in curricular and other decisions made at the school and district levels. While there is not necessarily a firm accountability mechanism for this practice, it does enable Tribes and, specifically, Tribal education directors, to exercise self-determination at multiple levels and provides some federal legal backing to the practice of demanding that districts comply with consultation regulations.

Generally speaking, state policies that have fallen under the policy era of Tribal Self-Determination have not, in fact, been developed with the intention of advancing Tribal Self-Determination at all. Tribal policies, then, can come into play in the enactment of state policies by limiting their scope and impact. As participants experienced, in these circumstances, policies have the capacity to create the conditions for resistance and refusal by cultivating a sense of support and affirmation for the work that resisters are doing. For some educators and stakeholders, this means negotiating forced moral dilemmas that require them to risk their jobs, funding, and access to resources, but with a sense of protection from the Tribe. For others, it means returning to Indigenous practices and entirely delegitimizing the role of the state and its power through epistemic disobedience. There seemed to be a distinction between policy

enactments that derived from stakeholders' positionalities and perspectives on their own purpose, role, and agency. "Well-intended paternalism," (as explored in chapters One and Two) for example, led some educators to take on a "save or abandon" mentality while a deep rootedness in relationality, advocacy, and sustenance led educators to stand more firmly in their disobedience to state policies. In this sense, policies take on a specific type of complexity wherein they are constructed and interpreted through different cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and temporal lenses and interpretations are largely dependent upon stakeholder positionality, who (or what entity) developed the policy in the first place, social critique involved in the enactment process, and proximity to alternate possibilities. In many instances, as explored by participants, epistemic disobedience guides enactments of community self-determination, sometimes in response to a policy and sometimes through a lens of lack of concern for policy altogether.

Overall, the answer to this question, based on the research findings explored in the previous two chapters, is that the relationship between policy enactments and education stakeholders and schools is intricate, nuanced, and complexly situated within positionality, place, and purpose. While there are arguments to suggest that policies create the social conditions and discourses that are used to make decisions about schools, there is also, in this study, evidence to suggest that policies also have the potential to create counterhegemonic discourses and actions.

### **Research Question Part Two: What Does This Dynamic Illuminate About the Story of Educational Development for Indigenous Students in the State?**

First and foremost, the findings from this study illuminate that the dynamic between policies and enactments, stakeholders, and schools, is not static. The dynamic

evolves and shifts based upon several different factors and players. The findings also illuminate that the epistemic tensions outlined in Chapter Two are consistently and creatively being navigated by students, teachers, and formal and non-formal educators in a number of ways. While the state and the policies that are created in the name of state authority make it difficult in many cases, a range of stakeholders continue to engage in disobedience and epistemic delinking that allows for the continued hope, imagining, and creating of different realities. The current story of educational development for Indigenous students in South Dakota, therefore, is situated within an explicit resistance to state hegemony that centers their wellness, belonging, and community self-determination.

The findings from this study, however, also establish the reality that the epistemic delinking that is taking place is not expansive enough, yet, to overturn or consistently and systematically counter harmful state practices. Based on the experiences of participants, I cannot predict a time in the near future where the state of South Dakota will be welcoming to Indigenous epistemological frames for educating Indigenous students. Movement towards community-defined and community-desired outcomes for young people, therefore, may continue to be slow as the state continues on its pathway toward total assimilation of Indigenous peoples into a particular vision for a unity, liberty, and Americanness. This does not mean there is no hope, however. It simply means that there is a continued call for collective resistance. Whether this resistance occurs through challenging dominant norms of academic success or through embracing relational practice in ways that support and sustain young people, such resistance will (and must) continue. Additionally, there are needs for the delinking frames to spread and become more commonplace, however the state will not facilitate that process and often withholds

resources from the individuals and groups who will. We need a different path forward that has not yet been clearly defined but is in the process of development by individuals who are tapping into their own self-determination and the sovereignty of Tribal nations. The state's refusal to acknowledge the necessity of this work is not surprising, nor is it new. And it does not mean that the work is not urgent and important. While building on their delinking processes, participants in this study had major impacts on the young people (and the broader world) around them. Simply because the work is not expansive enough to change policymaking practices in a systematic way or to inform the epistemic grounds of those policies does not mean that the work should not continue. It is, rather, processual and cyclical in nature, evolving constantly and in response to the current needs and realities. It requires a dedicated mass of individuals and communities who are committed to dreaming, hoping, and creating in the name of relationality, advocacy, and sustenance.

### **Theoretical Discussion**

The state of South Dakota, in its present form and structure, has consistently played a role in the continued devaluation of Indigenous education. Across the state, under the policies and practices of this current administration, Indigenous youth have struggled. The racism and anti-Indigeneity of the state, however, are not simple byproducts of a former colonized nation. They are actively and explicitly being perpetuated through intentionally dehumanizing policymaking. As I explored in earlier chapters, state officials in South Dakota have the ability to verbally deny a belief in equity without any consequence, as Sue Petersen did at the 2022 legislative session (Provide for the Creation and Funding of Oceti Sakowin Community-Based Schools,

2022, 1:52:00). They can effectively manipulate concepts of democracy and unity to serve their own purposes by arguing that “togetherness” requires a lack of political dissent, as Phyllis Heineman did during the social studies standards hearing (Board of Education Standards Hearing, April 17, 2023, 4:34:15). These actions are tactics of coloniality and are not surprising. Casanova (1965), Quijano and Ennis (2000), Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009), Maldonado-Torres (2016), Valenzuela (2019), and Cusicanqui (2012), and many others have studied the ways in which coloniality is perpetuated through economy, authority, the public sphere, and knowledge/subjectivity. These scholars and others who have studied imperialism and social reproduction have long been concerned with the ways in which society maintains and perpetuates oppressive structures. Critical Policy Studies, which served as another conceptual frame for this study, looks at the ways in which knowledge is used to shape and enact policies. Similarly, scholars like Shore and Wright (1997) argue that policies are “cultural texts” that serve to both empower and silence on the basis of hegemonic power. This study explored the ways in which policies and policymakers *attempt* to silence and empower through creating rules and regulations rooted in coloniality, which I would argue moves policies from being “cultural texts” to colonial weapons. While this delineation may seem simply semantic, I believe it is necessary. By referring to oppressive policies as “cultural texts,” even with the caveat that they serve to disempower and oppress, there is an implication that they are normalized and simply texts that are indicative of the structures of society, albeit not neutral. At a time when more policies are being passed daily, across the country, with the intention to limit civil liberties and condemn difference, it is necessary to position them as actively colonial and, simultaneously, limited.

By conceptualizing policies, specifically, for the purposes of this discussion, those pertaining to Indigenous education in South Dakota, as colonial weapons, they are exposed as hegemonic structures that are simple tools. While policies are certainly powerful and have recently served to cause immense harm to communities of color, women, and the LGBTQ2S+ community, this study also shows the ways in which they can be challenged, resisted, disrupted, and limited in their reach. One of the major commonalities between participants, specifically in their resistances to state hegemony, was their ability to see their own power, agency, and purpose as tantamount to, if not more powerful than, the attempts of the state to dehumanize them and their students. They conceptualized policies as mere tools of an oppressive state government, rather than as definitive rules that limited their agency. Participants, by doing so, effectively limited the power of the policies themselves.

As colonial mechanisms, policies can also be challenged by decolonial practices. As Mignolo (2009) and others argue, the practices of epistemic delinking and disobedience are practices by which individuals and groups separate their thinking from imperialism with the goal of “*regeneration of life*” (p. 161) versus the continued replication of colonial harm by different means. The participants in this study demonstrated an innate capacity, often formed by their own experiences with colonial harm and dehumanization, to view their work as an opportunity to develop an entirely different world, free from coloniality and its mechanisms. By continually working against colonial interests, they engaged in their own delinking. These practices, however, did not just aim to counter hegemonic discourses and policies. Rather, participants were able to imagine and name an entirely different reality. The desire to create something in service

of community self-determination, as many of the participants hoped for, rather than to simply create better policies or development programs under the same imperial and colonial structure that exists today, was a common thread. While they sometimes conceptualized roles for Tribal policies that would serve to counter state policies and ideologies, the large majority of reflections were rooted in a vision for the future that was centered around deep, meaningful, relational connections between individuals and communities. By delinking and engaging in epistemic disobedience, these participants do not just imagine a different reality, they actively create it. For example, when Josie visited with her students at the school we visited together, or when Carm referred to her students as nieces and nephews, or when Sarah was unfazed by our legislators' attempts at causing emotional harm and, instead, took on a mentality of "I am going to do this anyway," they each added something to the world that was rooted in a decolonial reality. Josie may have provided an opportunity for students to redefine how they consider the role of the teacher. Carm may have created a sense of belonging and connection. Sarah took away the self-ascribed power of the state policymakers. While these may seem like small steps toward a decolonial future, I argue that they are manifestations of resistance and reclamations of power that they engage with on a daily basis.

By rooting in relationality, resistance, and sustenance as primary epistemic frames, participants across this study demonstrated that there may be deeply embedded values and theories that drive resistance to state hegemony. As someone who has worked with educators and in education spaces for a long time, I have seen a multitude of ways in which educators imagine and enact their roles. I have experienced working with educators who deeply embody the "save or abandon" mentality that John, Aimee,

Cassandra, and others described and critiqued. I have also experienced working with educators and education stakeholders who seem to view their work differently, who *want* to connect with young people and their communities, who view their practice as a sacred craft rather than a job. These differences are marked by the three epistemic frames for disobedience that participants in this study so graciously illuminated: relationality, resistance, and sustenance. Embracing these frames changes how participants think about their roles as educators and education stakeholders, they inform how they consider the role and power of the state, and they illuminate possibilities for practice that are guided by something entirely separate from hegemonic state policy.

### **Implications for Research**

Many Indigenous scholars have spent a great deal of time on studying practices of decolonization and self-determination, self-governance, and Tribal policy. Additionally, it was never my intention to engage in this study to be considered an “expert” on Indigenous education. As a critical study of policy and enactments, however, this study illuminates the creative policy resistances that individuals undertake by epistemically de-linking from colonial practices and priorities. These de-linkings and disobediences build upon and complement the work of Indigenous scholars by situating their theoretical bases as potential pathways toward an Indigenous and decolonial future. In Chapter Five, I clarified the three main epistemic frames through which individuals understand their own disobedience. These included: relationality, resistance, and sustenance. These frames reflect Indigenous educational approaches found in the work of Simpson (2014), Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005), McGregor (2006), Corntassel (2012) and more. There is a clear call, therefore, for a more broadly-distributed approach to conceptualizing the

very role and purpose of education and educators across institutions and spaces. At the very least, more research is needed on how the ways in which educators conceptualize their own roles and the purpose of their work informs their resistance to hegemonic state policies.

Considering the roles of educators (broadly defined), the purpose of education, and the ways in which educators can (and, perhaps, should) enact their agency in service of decoloniality are some of the theoretical considerations that emerged through this work. First and foremost, when considering the roles of educators, the possibility of a decolonial future seems intimately linked to the capacity of educators and education stakeholders to conceptualize their work on the basis of deep, meaningful connection. In almost every professional development seminar I have ever attended, or any meeting for work, inevitably the conversation comes back to “it’s all about building those relationships.” This is typically referenced regarding teacher-to-student or teacher-to-family relationships that are seen as a vehicle for academic success. Given the reflections of the young people in this study, however, I wonder what is possible when we conceptualize the goal of relationships in education as a basic human need, rather than a way to drive forward capitalistic rhetoric of economic mobility and academics. It was compelling, in Chapter Four, to distill the ways in which young people felt the notions of academic success that were perpetuated by the state hindered or even disrupted their relationships with adults in the school. I would argue this likely disrupts peer relationships as well, although that was not necessarily referenced in the study. If there is general agreement in teacher preparation that relationships provide a pathway to academic success, but a possibly shared experience among young people that this rhetoric

is harmful, then I believe there is a gap in research and literature that needs to be further explored. Certainly, Indigenous scholars have written about relational practice and rootedness and I do not wish to imply that this work has been insufficient. I do, however, believe that there is a need to explore the student-level impacts more explicitly and to complicate the role of the educator in preparation programs more broadly.

Similarly, I would argue that this study illuminated a need for more research on the forced moral dilemmas that policies project upon education stakeholders and the impact that this has on their wellbeing and own sense of sustainability. My younger self would have likely condemned any educator who was not willing to lose their job for the sake of their students. After engaging in visiting with participants, however, I believe this is a complex negotiation and that individuals find creative and sustaining ways to manage the tension between what the state expects of them and what they expect from themselves. I also think, however that there is a need to delve more deeply into understanding how educators and education stakeholders perceive the risks associated with their jobs and if there are connections between perception of risk and different identity markers.

Lastly, I believe that this study draws a connection between particular worldviews and the likelihood that educators will resist hegemonic practices and policies from the state. I believe that this would be an area for further research, however. In particular, understanding what drives individual refusals and, more concretely, whether the epistemic frames for delinking that are expressed here are more widely felt could illuminate potential pathways forward for educators, policymakers, and administrators alike. Additionally, I believe there is an important opportunity to link these epistemic

frames to student experience in a more causal and direct way. While this study did engage with several former students who stated their own experiences with educators who hold these frames, and shared about their own epistemic delinking, I believe understanding if there is a more concrete connection between these frames and how students experience schooling spaces could be a crucial element in establishing a framework for teaching, learning, and navigating policy.

### **Implications for Practice**

I feel strongly that the stories shared here have implications for daily educator practice. First and foremost, I believe that the findings illuminate a need for teachers and other education stakeholders to consistently be engaging in spaces of shared meaning-making when it comes to policies. At best, individuals who participated in this study are often siloed or working within already established networks of revolutionary educators. In reality, it is more common for schools to become spaces where these conversations do not extend beyond the walls of the classroom and where, frankly, individuals do not frequently question or interrogate their own roles in enacting education policy.

Secondly, I believe that these findings articulate a strong case against the usage of terms like “change agents” and other “save the world” rhetoric in both teacher preparation and in professional development in school settings. There seems to be a connection between self-perception as a savior of Indigenous youth and the willingness to perpetuate and support colonial policies. Education professionals and administrators, therefore, could consider spending time and resources on developing a shared perspective on relational practice that is grounded in connection with students. They could also expend financial resources and time to work with educators on building their

relationship-building capacities. While I do not anticipate many schools will jump on board with implicit bias training any time soon, I also think that there is a core belief in students-as-relatives and the responsibilities that come with it that needs to be nurtured in schooling spaces. I chose to focus on this element of the epistemic delinking frames rather than the other two in these implications due to the fact that I believe notions of resistance/advocacy and sustenance/community perpetuity stem from relationality.

Lastly, this research illuminates that there are many opportunities for collaboration and communication between the Tribal Education Directors and the schools (including postsecondary) on the Reservation. When the CRT ban was initiated by Noem, the Tribe developed a resolution that stated schoolteachers had their support and would not be subject to retaliation for continuing to teach subjects deemed divisive by the state government. While this resolution was shared with administrators at schools, it was never broadly disseminated to teachers, families, and students. This was not a failure on the part of the Tribe, necessarily, as it was the responsibility of the administrators at each school and/or district to disseminate the information. The Tribe, however, could establish a practice of providing professional development for teachers and school leaders wherein they would be able to share this information more directly and explicitly with staff. This practice could create several opportunities for Tribal priorities to be shared across schools. To have more consistent Tribal presence in the schools could, in some cases, create a tone of oversight or hierarchy. On the other hand, it could instead create a sense of collaboration and cooperation between Tribes and schools that empowers educators to become more proximate to Tribal needs, community hopes and desires, and approaches to teaching that center relationality.

While this study takes place in the context of Indigenous education in South Dakota, I have no intention of making claims about the education of Indigenous youth, specifically, because I do not believe that non-Indigenous educators can or should be considered experts on Indigenous issues. I do, however, believe that this study provides implications for future educators and policymakers and their relationships with the political nature of their work. First and foremost, this study illuminates that epistemic delinking from harmful state practices requires a critical awareness and analysis of the ways in which policies and the practices that result from them work to serve hegemonic power structures and coloniality. Educators should intentionally and critically examine their practices, policies, and schooling environments to identify the ways in which these power structures are perpetuated in schooling. Secondly, this study illuminates that delinking is a choice rooted in a sense of agency and self-determination. If educators see policies as all-powerful entities, or even as informative texts, they may feel overwhelmed, powerless, or, in the case of the latter, that it is unnecessary to challenge them. On the other hand, by assuming that policies and state decisions are colonial in nature, educators and education stakeholders immediately illuminate a necessity for resistance. Lastly, future educators who wish to engage in epistemic delinking and disobedience, I believe, must seek out relationships, community, and spaces to dream and create. Each of the participants with whom I visited reiterated the need for connection and for deep and purposeful relationships with others, whether in their work, their schooling, or their daily lives. I believe that delinking, therefore, cannot necessarily happen in isolation but that it is predicated on resisting the isolation and loneliness that allows coloniality to thrive. These relationships create the conditions for us to be

grounded, but also to be challenged and held accountable to our collective work in loving and critical ways.

### **Conclusion**

Across Indigenous education spaces in South Dakota, individuals and communities are engaging in regular and consistent delinking from the Colonial Matrix of Power. They do this by establishing a different vision for education, clarifying their roles as protectors, advocates, and sustainers of the wellbeing and identities of young people, and epistemically delegitimizing state authority and power over education. These are powerful acts of resistance that provide a plethora of opportunities for different futures and different educational realities for Indigenous students (and all students, more broadly).

The realities of Indigenous education are complex and painful and the colonial values embodied by state policies are deeply felt by actors across the policy enactment spectrum. There is, however, always hope. The epistemic frames established by the state construct colonial realities that must be resisted, contested, and negotiated by education stakeholders through their own disobedience and collective maladjustment. In doing this, the role of state policy becomes limited and the role of Tribal policy becomes a vehicle toward community self-determination that is rooted in community priorities, values, and a vision of Indigenous futures that was never intended, by the state, to exist.

## References

- Ablavsky, G. (2015). Beyond the Indian Commerce Clause. *The Yale Law Journal*, 124(4), 1012-1090.
- Alfred, T. & Corntassel, J. Being Indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism. *Government and Opposition*, 40(4), 597-614. doi:10.1111/j.1477-7053.2005.00166.x
- American Institutes for Research (2016, July 14). ESSA and Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawai'ian students. Retrieved from: <https://www.air.org/resource/essa-and-native-american-alaska-native-and-native-hawaiian-students>
- An act making appropriations for the current and contingent expenses of the Indian Department. (1871, March 3). (Indian Appropriations Act), 41st Congress, Sess. III, Ch. 119–120.
- An act to prohibit school districts from using school or athletic team names, mascots, or nicknames that are determined to be racially derogatory or discriminatory, South Dakota House Bill 1143, 2019-2020 Session (2020). <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/12031/65220>
- An act to ratify an agreement with certain bands of the Sioux Nation of Indians and also with the Northern Arapaho and Cheyenne Indians. (1877). 44<sup>th</sup> Congress, Session ii, Ch.72. <https://maint.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/44th-congress/session-2/c44s2ch69.pdf>
- Associated Press (2020, March 24). South Dakota governor signs ‘riot-boosting’ penalties. *AP*. <https://apnews.com/south-dakota-governor-signs-riot-boosting-penalties-be8c8ca5130fe946598a344ec59e004e>

- Barnhardt, R. & Kawagley, A.O. (2005). Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska Native ways of knowing. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 8-23.
- Bartlett, L. (2005). Dialogue, knowledge, and teacher-student relations: Freirean pedagogy in theory and practice. *Comparative Education Review*, 49(3), 344-364.
- Biden, J. (2021, October 11). Executive Order on the White House initiative on advancing educational equity, excellence, and economic opportunity for Native Americans and strengthening Tribal colleges and universities.  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/10/11/executive-order-on-the-white-house-initiative-on-advancing-educational-equity-excellence-and-economic-opportunity-for-native-americans-and-strengthening-tribal-colleges-and-universities/>
- Blick, J.P. (1988). Genocidal warfare in Tribal societies as a result of European-induced culture conflict. *Man*, 23(4), 654-670.
- Bray, M. (2014). Actors and purposes in comparative education. In: M.Bray, B.Adamson, & M. Mason (Eds) *Comparative education research approaches and methods*. Comparative Education Research Centre.
- Brayboy, B.M.J. (2005). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. *The Urban Review*, 37(5), 425–446.
- Brayboy, B.M.J., & Castagno, A.E. (2009). Self-determination through self-education: Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students in the USA. *Teaching Education*, 20(1), 31-53.
- Brayboy, B.M.J. & Lomawaima, K.T. (2018). Why don't more Indians do better in school? The battle between U.S. schooling and American Indian/Alaska Native

education. *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 147(2), 82-94.

doi:10.1162/DAED\_a\_00492

- Brockell, G. (2019, August 25). George Washington owned slaves and ordered Indians killed. Will a mural of that history be hidden? *The Washington Post*.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/08/25/george-washington-owned-slaves-ordered-indians-killed-will-mural-that-history-be-hidden/>
- Brown, A.M (2021). *Holding change: The way of emergent strategy facilitation and mediation*. AK Press.
- Brownlie, R.J. (2012). The co-optation of Tecumseh: The War of 1812 and racial discourses in upper Canada. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 23(1), 39-63. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015727ar>
- Burnett, J. (2005, June 15). The Navajo Nation's own 'Trail of Tears.' *NPR*.  
<https://www.npr.org/2005/06/15/4703136/the-navajo-nation-s-own-trail-of-tears>
- Cannella, C. (2014). Enriching critical pedagogy with Indigenous theory toward a pedagogy of humanization. In Cammarota, J. & Romero, A. (Eds.) *The Public Option for Educational Revolution* (pp. 171-191). University of Arizona Press.
- Carey, R.L. (2014). A cultural analysis of the achievement gap discourse: Challenging the language and labels used in the work of school reform. *Urban Education*, 49(4), 440-468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085913507459>
- Carspecken, P. & Apple, M. (1992). Critical qualitative research. In M. LeCompte, W. Millroy, & J. Preissley (Eds.), *Handbook of critical research in education* (pp. 507-554). Academic Press.

- Casanova, G. (1965). Internal colonialism and national development. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 1(4), 27-37.
- Castagno, A.E. & Brayboy, B.M.J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 941-993.
- Cherpako, D. (2019). *Making Indigenous-led education a public priority: The benefits of land-based education and programming*. Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness. <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Land-Based-Education-Pamphlet.pdf>
- Civilization Fund Act (1819). Ch. 85. 1.3 Stat 516.
- Clinton, W.J. (1998). Executive Order 13096—American Indian and Alaska Native Education. *Federal Register*, 63(154), 42681-42684.
- Coffey, W. & Tsosie, R. (2001). Rethinking the tribal sovereignty doctrine: Cultural sovereignty and the collective future of Indian Nations. *Stanford Law and Policy Review*, 12(2), 191-221.
- Cook, K. (2008). Critical ethnography. In L.Given (Ed.) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (pp.149-151). SAGE Publications.
- Cook, R. (2015, May 5). Racism: An open wound for Native students. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-racism-an-open-wound-for-native-students/2015/05#:~:text=Students%20from%20American%20Horse%20School,at%20the%20center%20in%20January.>

- Corntassel, J. (2012). Re-envisioning resurgence: Indigenous pathways to decolonization and sustainable self-determination. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1*(1), 86-101.
- Cortina, R. (2019). "The passion for what is possible" in comparative and international education. *Comparative Education Review, 63*(4), 463-479.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). Five qualitative approaches to inquiry. In J.W. Creswell (Eds.), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (pp. 53-84). Sage.
- Curtin, S. & Hedegaard, H. (2019). *Suicide rates for females and males by race and ethnicity: United States, 1999 and 2017*. National Center for Health Statistics. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/index.htm>.
- Cusicanqui, S.R. (2012). *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A reflection on the practices and discourses of decolonization. South Atlantic Quarterly, 111*(1), 95-109.
- Davis, J. (2013). *Survival schools: The American Indian Movement and community education in the Twin Cities*. University of Minnesota Press.
- de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., Branstetter, C., & Wang, X. (2019). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018* (NCES 2019-038). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- de Las Casas, B. (1552). *A brief account of the destruction of the Indies*. R.Hewson. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/20321/pg20321.html>

Deloria, V. J. (1969). *Custer died for your sins: An Indian manifesto*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., & Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2008). *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies*. SAGE Publications.

Dobson, D. (2013). Manifest destiny and the environmental impacts of westward expansion. *Flinders Journal of History and Politics* (29), 41-69.  
<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/81291419.pdf>

Dubois, V. (2015). Critical policy ethnography. In F. Fischer et al. (Eds.). *Handbook of critical policy studies* (pp.462-480). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Dunbar Jr., Christopher (2008). Critical race theory and Indigenous methodologies. In Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., & Tuhiwai Smith, L. (Eds): *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Sage.

Enos, A.D. (2015). Deep Sovereignty. In Huaman, E.S., & Sriraman, B. (Eds.). *Indigenous innovation education*. Sense Publishers. doi: 10.1007/978-94-6300-226-4\_3

Exec. Order No. 2021-11. South Dakota. July 29, 2021.

Exec. Order No. 2022-02. South Dakota. April 5, 2022.

Exec. Order No. 13950, 85 FR 60683 (September 22, 2020).

Fischer, F., Torgerson, D., Durnova, A., & Orsini, M. (2015). *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Fitzpatrick, K. & May, S. (2022). *Critical ethnography and education: Theory, methodology, and ethics*. Routledge.

- Forester, J. (2012, July). *On the theory and practice of interpretive policy analysis: From the micro-politics of practice to interpretive analysis and theorizing in action*. Paper presented at the Interpretive Policy Analysis Conference, Tilburg, The Netherlands, July 5-7, 2012.
- Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition. Continuum.
- Fryberg, S. & Markus, H.R. (2007). Cultural models of education in American Indian, Asian American, and European American contexts. *Social Psychology of Education*, 2007(10), 213-246.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Gilio-Whitaker, D. (2013, January 17). Indian self-determination and sovereignty. *Indian Country Today*. <https://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/opinion/indian-self-determination-and-sovereignty-147025>
- Giroux, H.A. (2019). Neoliberalism and weaponising of language and education. *Race and Class*, 61(1), 26-45.
- Groves, S. (2020, November 18). South Dakota's Noem defends forgoing masks as virus surges. *Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/south-dakota-kristi-noem-coronavirus-pandemic-0d58c61ba20c8bf9ba4ee02ef46b1da0>
- Groves, S. (2022, September 12). Conservative college's curriculum gets foothold in S.Dakota. *Associated Press*. <https://apnews.com/article/education-donald-trump-michigan-south-dakota-sioux-falls-54712a652c5a0f1f74deeb280dcfc01>
- Gunderson, D. (2019, October 3). 'I've never told anyone': Stories of life in Indian boarding schools. *MPR News*.

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2019/10/03/stories-of-life-in-indian-boarding-schools>

Haiar, J. (2024, January 14). Bill would raise cap on private school scholarships funded by insurance companies. *The Mitchell Republic*.

<https://www.mitchellrepublic.com/news/south-dakota/bill-would-raise-cap-on-private-school-scholarships-funded-by-insurance-companies#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20lawmakers%20raised%20the,place%20to%20educate%20their%20children.%E2%80%9D>

Hendry, J. (2021, February 2). Senate rejects bill creating Oceti Sakowin community based schools. *South Dakota Public Broadcasting*. <https://www.sdpb.org/blogs/politics-public-policy/senate-rejects-bill-creating-oceti-sakowin-community-based-schools/>

Hickling-Hudson, A. & Ahlquist, R. (2003). Contesting the curriculum in the schooling of Indigenous children in Australia and the United States: From Eurocentrism to culturally powerful pedagogies. *Comparative Education Review*, 47(1), 64-89.

Holmes, A. & González, N. (2017). Finding sustenance: An indigenous relational pedagogy. In D.Paris & H.S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. (pp.207-223). Teachers College Press.

Honig, B. (2021). *A feminist theory of refusal*. Harvard University Press. doi: 10.4159/9780674259249

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

- Howard, L. & Ali, A. (2016). (Critical) educational ethnography: Methodological premise and pedagogical objectives. *New directions in educational ethnography (Studies in Educational Ethnography, Vol. 13)*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-210X20150000013010>
- Indigenous Environmental Network (2021). What is: Indigenous sovereignty and Tribal sovereignty. <https://www.ienearth.org/what-is-indigenous-sovereignty-and-tribal-sovereignty/>
- Irwin, L. (1997). Freedom, law, and prophecy: A brief history of Native American religious resistance. *American Indian Quarterly*, 21(1), 35-55.
- Irwin, V., Wang, K., Tezil, T., Zhang, J., Filbey, A., Jung, J., Bullock Mann, F., Dilig, R. & Parker, S. (2023). Report on the condition of education 2021. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2021/2021144.pdf>
- Ismail, S.M. & Cazden, C.B. (2005). Struggles for Indigenous education and self-determination: Culture, context, and collaboration. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 88-92. doi:10.1525/aeq.2005.36.1.088
- Jackson, A. (1830, December 6). *On Indian removal*. [Transcript]. National Park Service. [https://www.nps.gov/museum/tmc/manz/handouts/andrew\\_jackson\\_annual\\_message.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/museum/tmc/manz/handouts/andrew_jackson_annual_message.pdf)
- Jackson, J. (2022, April 28). Former workgroup member concerned about social studies commission. *Keloland*. <https://www.keloland.com/keloland-com-original/former-workgroup-member-concerned-about-social-studies-commission/>
- Joint Committee on Appropriations (2024, January 17). *SD department of Tribal relations*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tU8zTSKfUJ8>

- Kaczke, L. (2020, July 6). Twenty protestors, one counter-protester arrested near Mount Rushmore on Friday. *Argus Leader*. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/politics/2020/07/06/mount-rushmore-protests-20-protesters-one-counter-protester-arrested/5386711002/>
- Kalt, J.P. & Singer, J.W. (2004). *Myths and realities of Tribal sovereignty: The law and economics of Indian self-rule*. Harvard University Native Issues Research Symposium Working Paper RWP04-016.  
[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=529084](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=529084)
- Kena, G., Hussar W., McFarland J., de Brey C., Musu-Gillette, L., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Rathbun, A., Wilkinson- Flicker, S., Diliberti M., Barmer, A., Bullock Mann, F., and Dunlop Velez, E. (2016). *The Condition of Education 2016* (NCES 2016-144). U.S.Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved [date] from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.
- Kendi, I. X. (2017). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. Bold Type Books.
- Kincheloe, J., McLaren, P., Steinberg, S., & Monzo, L. (2017) Critical pedagogy and qualitative research: Advancing the bricolage. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (5th Ed.)*, 235-260. Sage.
- King, G. (2012, July 17). Where the buffalo no longer roamed. *Smithsonian Magazine*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/where-the-buffalo-no-longer-roamed-3067904/>
- King, T. (2008). *The truth about stories: A Native narrative*. University of Minnesota Press.

- Koyama, J. (2012). Making failure matter: Enacting No Child Left Behind's standards, accountabilities, and classifications. *Educational Policy*, 26(6), 870-891.
- Kubow, P. (2007). Teachers' constructions of democracy: Intersections of western and Indigenous knowledge in South Africa and Kenya. *Comparative Education Review*, 51(3), 307-328
- Kukutai, T. & Taylor, J. (2016). *Indigenous data sovereignty: Toward an agenda*. ANU Press.
- Kunesh, P. (2022, June 15). The power of self-determination in building sustainable economies in Indian country. *Economy Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-power-of-self-determination-in-building-sustainable-economies-in-indian-country/>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services (30<sup>th</sup> anniversary expanded edition)*. The Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lloyd, D. & Wolfe, P. (2016). Settler colonial logics and the neoliberal regime. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 6(2), 109-118. doi: 10.1080/2201473X.2015.1035361
- Lomawaima, K.T. (1995). *They called it prairie light: The story of Chilocco Indian school*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Lomawaima, K.T. (1999). The unnatural history of American Indian education. In K.G. Swisher and J. Tippeconnic (Eds.), *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education* (pp. 1-33). Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.

- Lomawaima, K.T. & McCarty, T. (2006). *“To remain an Indian” : Lessons in democracy from a century of Native American education*. Teachers College Press.
- Lomawaima, K. T. & Ostler, J. (2018). Reconsidering Richard Henry Pratt: Cultural genocide and Native liberation in an era of racial oppression. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 57(1), 79-100.
- Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock, 187 U.S. 553 (1903)
- Madison, S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Maguire, M., Braun, A., & Ball, S. (2015). Where you stand depends on where you sit: the social construction of policy enactments in the (English) secondary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 36(4), 485-499.
- Maguire, M., Hoskins, K., Ball, S. & Braun, A. (2011). Policy discourses in school texts. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), 597-609.
- Mahajan, G. (2002). *The multicultural path*. Sage Publications.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality. Frantz Fanon Foundation.  
[https://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres\\_Outline\\_Ten\\_Theses-10.23.16.pdf](https://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres_Outline_Ten_Theses-10.23.16.pdf)
- Matzen, M. (2021, February 23). Gov. Kristi Noem’s \$900K push for SD civics education curriculum clears first hurdle in House. *Argus Leader*. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/02/23/house-votes-governor-kristi-noem-south-dakota-civics-education-bill/4566686001/>

- Matzen, M. (2022, February 10). House judiciary committee passes bill protecting parents' rights in education. *Argus Leader*. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2022/02/10/south-dakota-house-committee-passes-parental-rights-bill/6736422001/>
- Matzen, M. (2023, April 14). How South Dakota's social studies standards became so controversial. *Argus Leader*. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2023/04/14/south-dakota-social-studies-standards-unfolded-opposition-gov-kristi-noem-oceti-sakowin/70112340007/>
- May, S. & Aikman, S. (2003). Indigenous education: Addressing current issues and developments. *Comparative Education*, 39(2), 139-145.
- Mayer, E. (2023, April 17). Board members approve social studies standards 5-2. *Keloland*. <https://www.keloland.com/keloland-com-original/board-members-approve-social-studies-standards-5-2/>
- McCarty, T. & Lee, T. (2014). Critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy and Indigenous education sovereignty. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 101-124.
- McGovern, S. (2000). Reclaiming education: Knowledge practices and Indigenous communities. *Comparative Education Review*, 44(4), 523-529.
- McGregor, D. (2006). Traditional ecological knowledge. *Ideas: The Arts and Science Review*, 3(1), <http://www.silvafor.org/assets/silva/PDF/DebMcGregor.pdf>
- McKeever, A. (2020, October 28). The heartbreaking, controversial history of Mount Rushmore. *National Geographic*. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/the-strange-and-controversial-history-of-mount-rushmore>

- Mercer, B. (2021, December 13). A survey of many S.D. teachers found Oceti Sakowin standards aren't taught in their schools. *Keloland*.  
<https://www.keloland.com/news/capitol-news-bureau/a-survey-of-many-s-d-teachers-found-oceti-sakowin-standards-arent-taught-in-their-schools/>
- Meyer, M. (2003). Hawaiian hermeneutics and the triangulation of meaning: Gross, subtle, causal. *Social Justice*, 30(4), 54-63.
- Meyer, M. (2011). Ekolu mea nui: Three ways to experience the world. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 31(20), 11-16.
- Mifflin, J. (2017). Native Americans, Mexicans, and manifest destiny: How cultural and ethnic stereotypes eased the way for westward expansion. *Journal of the West*, 56(1), 65-68.
- Mignolo, W. (2002). The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(1), 57-96.
- Mignolo, W. (2007). Delinking. *Cultural Studies*, 21, 449-514. doi: 10.1080/09502380601162647
- Mignolo, W. (2009). Epistemic disobedience, independent thought, and decolonial freedom. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(7-8), 159-181.
- Mignolo, W. (2011). *The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.
- Miller, R.J. (2002). Exercising cultural self-determination: The Makah Indian tribe goes whaling. *American Indian Law Review*, 25(2), 165-273.
- Miller, R.J. (2011). American Indians, the doctrine of discovery, and manifest destiny. *Wyoming Law Review*, 11(2), 329-349.

Mohawk, J. (2004, October 15-17). *Survive and thrive* [Conference presentation].

Bioneers 15th Annual Conference, San Rafael, CA, United States.

Morgan, T. (1892, August 27). *Rules for Indian courts*. House Executive Document No.

1, part 5, vol II, 52 Congress, 2 session, serial 3088, pp.28-31.

<https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674435056.c47>

Moulder, M.A. (2011). Cherokee practice, missionary intentions: Literacy learning

among early nineteenth-century Cherokee women. *College Composition and*

*Communication*, 63(1), 75-96.

National Conference of State Legislatures (2013, January 13). An issue of sovereignty.

<https://www.ncsl.org/quad-caucus/an-issue-of-sovereignty>

National Park Service (2021, July 9). *The Dawes Act*. History and Culture in the

Badlands. [https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm#:~:text=If%20they%](https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm#:~:text=If%20they%20accepted%20the%20allotment,differences%20between%20the%20two%20acts)

[20accepted%20the%20allotment,differences%20between%20the%20two%20acts](https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm#:~:text=If%20they%20accepted%20the%20allotment,differences%20between%20the%20two%20acts)

Native American Rights Fund (1998). President Clinton signs executive order on Indian

education: Historic announcement will direct sweeping changes in Indian

education. *NARF Legal Review*, 23(2).

Newland, B. (2022). *Federal Indian boarding school initiative investigative report*.

Bureau of Indian Affairs. [https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-](https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf)

[files/bsi\\_investigative\\_report\\_may\\_2022\\_508.pdf](https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf)

Noem, K. (2020, August 26). Republican national committee speech [Transcript]. Iowa

State University Archives of Women's Political Communication. [https://awpc.](https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2020/10/07/rnc-speech-aug-26-2020-2/)

[cattcenter.iastate.edu/2020/10/07/rnc-speech-aug-26-2020-2/](https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2020/10/07/rnc-speech-aug-26-2020-2/)

- Noem, K. (2021, January 8). The republican party has failed America and here's how it needs to change now. *The Federalist*. <https://thefederalist.com/2021/01/08/the-republican-party-has-failed-america/>
- Noem, K. [@GovKristiNoem]. (2021, March 8). *In South Dakota, we're celebrating #InternationalWomensDay by defending weomen's sports! I'm exccted to sign this bill very soon* [X Post] X.  
<https://x.com/govkristinoem/status/1369017886514311180>
- Noem, K. (2021, May 24). Civics Letter to Board of Regents President. Office of the Governor. <https://www.scribd.com/document/509324888/Gov-Noem-civics-letter-to-SDBOR>
- O'Reilley, K. (2012). *Ethnographic Methods*. Taylor & Francis.
- Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93-97. doi: 10.3102/0013189X12441244
- Paris, D. & Alim, H.S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85-137).
- Paris, D & Alim, H.S. (Eds.) (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- Pevar, S. (2012). *The rights of Indians and tribes* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Pfankuch, B. (2022, June 7). Teachers in South Dakota endure new stress as politics and culture war seep into classrooms. *Argus Leader*. <https://www.argusleader.com/>

story/news/2022/06/07/south-dakota-teachers-s-d-endure-new-stresses-classroom/7547646001/

Philip, K. (1983). Termination: A legacy of the Indian New Deal. *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 14(2), 165-180.

Pope Alexander VI (1493, May 4). Inter Caetera. In F.G. Davenport, (Ed.) (1917). *European treaties bearing on the history of the United States and its dependencies to 1648* Carnegie Institution of Washington, 61–63.

<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/primary-documents/inter-caetera-by-pope-alexander-vi-may-4-1493/>

Pratt, R.H. (1892). The advantages of mingling Indians with whites. In Barrows, I. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction* (pp. 45-58). Press of Geo. H. Ellis.

Provide for the creation and funding of Oceti Sakowin community-based schools, South Dakota Senate Bill 66, 2019-2020 Session (2020). <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/11620>

Provide for the creation and funding of Oceti Sakowin community-based schools, South Dakota Senate Bill 68, 2020-2021 Session (2021). <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/21812>

Provide for the creation and funding of Oceti Sakowin community-based schools, South Dakota Senate Bill 139, 2021-2022 Session (2022). <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/23292>

Prucha, F. (2000). *Documents of United States Indian policy* (3rd ed.). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

- Pruden, H. & Edmo, S. (2016). Two spirit people: Sex, gender, and sexuality in historic and contemporary Native America. National Congress of American Indians Archives. [https://archive.ncai.org/policy-research-center/initiatives/Pruden-Edmo\\_TwoSpiritPeople.pdf](https://archive.ncai.org/policy-research-center/initiatives/Pruden-Edmo_TwoSpiritPeople.pdf)
- Public Law 93-638, 25 U.S.C. ch. 14, subch. II § 5301 et seq (1975).  
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-88/pdf/STATUTE-88-Pg2203.pdf#page=1>
- Public Law 95-471, 25 U.S.C., § 1215 (1978). <https://www.congress.gov/95/statute/STATUTE-92/STATUTE-92-Pg1325.pdf>
- Public Law 101-477, 25 U.S.C. ch.31 §2901 et seq (1990). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/2167>
- Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 168-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>
- Quijano, A. & Ennis, M. (2000). Coloniality of power, eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Neplanta: Views from South*, 1(3), 533-580.
- Raposa, M. (2018, January 5). Memes, murals, and a new hope for saving the Lakota language. *Argus Leader*. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2018/01/25/memes-murals-and-new-hope-saving-lakota-language/1059351001/>
- Rashid, Marghalara, Hodgson, Carol, & Luig, Thea (2019). Ten tips for conducting focused ethnography in medical education research. *Medical Education Online*, 24(1). 10.1080/10872981.2019.1624133
- Require the display of the state motto in public school classrooms, South Dakota House Bill 1224, 2020-2021 session (2021). <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/22428>

Require the national motto of the United States to be displayed in public schools, South

Dakota Senate Bill 55, 2018-2019 session (2019).

[https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/ Bill/9327](https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/9327)

Riley, A. (2017). Native nations and the constitution: An inquiry into extra-constitutionality. *Harvard Law Review Forum*, 130(6), 173-199.

Riot Boosting Act, S.B. 189, 94th Session (2019). <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/10176>

Romero, A. The battle for educational sovereignty and the right to save the lives of our children. In J. Cammarota, A. Romero, & D. Stovall (Eds.), *Raza studies: The public option for educational revolution*. University of Arizona Press.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183pbmn>

Rosier, P.C. "They are ancestral homelands": Race, place, and politics in Cold War Native America, 1945-1961. *The Journal of American History*, 92(4), 1300-1326.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Salmon, E. (2000). Kincentric ecology: Indigenous perceptions of the human-nature relationship. *Ecological Applications*, 10(5), 1327-1332. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2641288>

Savage, C., Hindle, R., Meyer, L., Hynds, A., Penetito, W., & Sleeter, C. (2011).

Culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom: Indigenous student experiences across the curriculum. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(3), 183-198.

- Senate State Affairs Committee (2022, February 9). *South Dakota Legislature*. [Audio File] <https://sdpb.sd.gov/sdpbpodcast/2022/sst20.mp3>
- Shaer, M. (2016, October) The sordid history of Mount Rushmore. *Smithsonian*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/sordid-history-mount-rushmore-180960446/>
- Shore, C. & Wright, S. (1997). *Anthropology of policy: Critical perspectives on governance and power*. Routledge.
- Simpson, A. (2007). On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, ‘voice’ and colonial citizenship. *Junctures-The journal for thematic dialogue*, 9(Dec.2007), 67-80.
- Simpson, L. (2004). Anticolonial strategies for the recovery and maintenance of Indigenous knowledge. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3/4), 373-384.
- Simpson, L. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), 1-25.
- Sleeter, C. (2017). Critical race theory and the whiteness of teacher education. *Urban Education*, 52(2), 155-169.
- South Dakota Board of Educational Standards. (2023, April 17). *SD board of educational standards meeting*. South Dakota Public Broadcasting. <https://www.sd.net/blogs/archive/4172023-sd-board-of-educational-standards-meeting/>
- South Dakota Department of Education (2020). *Guidance for South Dakota ESSA Tribal consultation*. <https://doe.sd.gov/title/documents/Tribal-Cons-Guid-2020.pdf>
- South Dakota Department of Education (2022). *South Dakota DOE 2021-2022 Report Card*. [Data File]. <https://doe.sd.gov/reportcard/>

- South Dakota Department of Education (2023). *South Dakota DOE 2022-2023 Report Card*. [Data File]. <https://doe.sd.gov/reportcard/>
- South Dakota Department of Education (2023, April 17). *South Dakota Social Studies Standards*. <https://doe.sd.gov/ContentStandards/documents/SS-Standards-2023.pdf>
- South Dakota Governor (2021, September 20). *Gov. Kristi Noem to delay social studies standards*. [Press Release]. Retrieve from <https://governor.sd.gov/news/press-releases.aspx>
- South Dakota Suicide Prevention (2020). Facts & Stats. <https://sdsuicideprevention.org/about-suicide/facts-stats/>
- Spillane, J. (2004). *Standards deviation: How schools misunderstand education policy*. Harvard University Press.
- Standing Bear, L. (1960). *Land of the spotted eagle*. May Jones.
- Stanton, C.R. (2019). Educational Manifest Destiny: Exclusion, role allocation, and functionalization in reservation bordertown district admission policies. *American Journal of Education*, 125(2), 201-229.
- Stephanson, A. (1995). *Manifest destiny: American expansion and the empire of the right*. Hill and Wang.
- Stephens, T. (2023, February 10). More than 100 turn out for hearing on social studies standards. *Rapid City Journal*. <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/politics/2023/02/10/more-than-100-turn-out-for-hearing-on-social-studies-standards/69894756007/>

- Stern, J. (2021, May 28). Pipeline of violence: The oil industry and missing and murdered Indigenous women. *Immigration and human rights law review*.  
<https://lawblogs.uc.edu/ihrlr/2021/05/28/pipeline-of-violence-the-oil-industry-and-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women/>
- Stoddart, M. C. J. (2007). Ideology, hegemony, discourse: A critical review of theories of knowledge and power. *Social Thought and Research*, 28(1), 191-225. doi: 10.17161/STR.1808.5226
- Stoler, L.A. (2010). *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. University of California Press. <https://doi-org.ezp2.lib.umn.edu/10.2307/j.ctv15d80x0.7>
- Sumida Huaman, E. (2011). Transforming education, transforming society: The co-construction of critical peace education and Indigenous education. *Journal of Peace Education*, 8(3), 243-258.
- Szasz, M.C. (1999). *Education and the American Indian: The road to self-determination since 1928* (3rd ed.). University of New Mexico Press.
- Takeda, N. & Williams, J. (2018). Pluralism, identity, and the state: National education policy towards Indigenous minorities in Japan and Canada. *Comparative Education*, 44(1), 75-91.
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography* (1st ed.). Sage Publications.
- Thomas, J. & O'Maolchatha, A. (1989). Reassessing the critical metaphor: An optimistic revisionist view. *Justice Quarterly*, 6(2), 143-172.
- Thornton, R. (1984). Cherokee population losses during the Trail of Tears: A new perspective and a new estimate. *Ethnohistory*, 31(4), 289-300.

Tlostanova, M. and Mignolo, W. (2009). Global coloniality and the decolonial option.

*Kult*, 6 (Special Issue), 130-147.

Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868, April 29). General Records of the United States

Government; Record Group 11; National Archives.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/fort-laramie-treaty>

Trump, D.J. (2020a). *Remarks by President Trump at South Dakota's 2020 Mount*

*Rushmore fireworks celebration* [Transcript].

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-south-dakotas-2020-mount-rushmore-fireworks-celebration-keystone-south-dakota/>

Tuck, E. (Host) (2020, April 21). Defenders of the Water School: An interview with

Alayna Eagle Shield (No. 27) [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Henceforward*.

Tkaronto Circle Lab. <https://www.thehenceforward.com/episodes/2020/4/21/>

[episode-27-defenders-of-the-water-school-an-interview-with-alayna-eagle-shield](https://www.thehenceforward.com/episodes/2020/4/21/episode-27-defenders-of-the-water-school-an-interview-with-alayna-eagle-shield)

Tuck, E., McKenzie, M., & McCoy, K. (2014). Land education: Indigenous, post-

colonial, and decolonizing perspectives on place and environmental education

research, *Environmental Education Research*, 20(1), 1-23.

Tuck, E. & Yang, K.W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization:*

*Indigeneity, Education, & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous*

*peoples*, 2nd edition. Otago University Press.

Turner, F.J. (1893). The significance of the frontier in American History. *American*

*Historical Society Annual Report*, 1893, 197-227.

United Nations (General Assembly). (2007). *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*.

United States Census Bureau (2019). *Quick Facts: Todd County, South Dakota; Corson County, South Dakota; Oglala Lakota County, South Dakota; Minnehaha County, South Dakota; Brookings County, South Dakota; Lake County, South Dakota*. [Data File]. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/toddcountysouthdakota,corsoncountysouthdakota,oglalalakotacountysouthdakota,minnehahacountysouthdakota,brookingscountysouthdakota,lakecountysouthdakota/PST045218>

United States Constitution, Article 1, § 8

United States Department of Health and Human Services (2019). Mental and behavioral health-American Indians/Alaska Natives. <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/mental-and-behavioral-health-american-indiansalaska-natives#:~:text=Violent%20deaths%2C%20unintentional%20injuries%2C%20homicide,for%20American%20Indian%2FAlaska%20Natives.>

United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, 448 U.S. 371 (1980)

University of Alaska Fairbanks (2021). *Indian Reorganization Act (1934)*. <https://www.uaf.edu/tribal/academics/112/unit-2/indianreorganizationact1934.php>

University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts (2024). *US-Dakota War of 1862*. <https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/us-dakota-war-1862>

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. SUNY Series, The Social Context of Education.

- Valenzuela, A. (2019). The struggle to decolonize official knowledge in Texas' state curriculum: Side-stepping the colonial matrix of power. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 52*(2-3), 197-215.
- Vandebroek, I., Reyes-Garcia, V., deAlbuquerque, U.P., Bussmann, R., & Pieroni, A. (2011). Local knowledge: Who cares? *Journal of ethnobiology and ethnomedicine, 7*(1), 35-41. doi: 10.1186/1746-4269-7-35
- Villegas, A.M. & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(1), 20-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053001003>
- Vondracek, C. (2021, February 1). Bill to create 'Oceti Sakowin' charter schools defeated in South Dakota senate. *The Globe*. <https://www.dglobe.com/news/government-and-politics/6867105-Bill-to-create-Oceti-Sakowin-charter-schools-defeated-in-South-Dakota-Senate>
- Weber-Pillwax, C. (1999). Indigenous research methodology: Exploratory discussion of an elusive subject. *Journal of Educational Thought, 33*(1), 31-45.
- Weiss, A. (Host). (2020, October 7). The legacy of manifest destiny (and why we re-named this podcast) (No. 11) [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Landscape*. Center for Western Priorities. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-legacy-of-manifest-destiny-and-why-we-re/id1170695833?i=1000493903075>
- White Hat, A. (2012). *Life's Journey—Zuya*. University of Utah Press.
- Wilkins, D. (2016). A history of federal Indian policy. In S. Lobo, S. Talbot, & T.L. Morris (Eds.), *Native American voices: A reader* (3rd ed, pp. 104-112).

- Wilkins, D. & Lomawaima, K.T. (2002). *Uneven ground: American Indian sovereignty and federal law*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Willow, A.J. (2013). Doing sovereignty in Native North America: Anishinaabe counter-mapping and the struggle for land-based self-determination. *Human Ecology*, 41(6), 871-884.
- Wilson, M. (2012). Reclaiming self-determination from the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(7), 905-912. DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2012.720734
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood.
- Windchief, S. (2020). Holographic epistemology (Indigenous common sense): A Nakòna example. In E. Sumida Huaman & N.D. Martin (Eds), *Indigenous knowledge systems and research methodologies: Local solutions and global opportunities* (pp.49-68). Canadian Scholars.
- Wolcott, H.F. (2008). *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (2nd Ed.). Alta Mira.
- Woodworth, K., Chow, K., Chen, W.B., Anderson, L., Butler, A., Turnbull, B., Brayboy, B., & Hirshberg, D. (2019). *Implementation of the Title VI Indian education formula grants program*. US Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-vi/title-vi-report.pdf>
- Writer, J. H. (2008). Unmasking, exposing, and confronting: Critical race theory, tribal critical race theory and multicultural education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 10(2), 1-16.

- Zoints, A. (2020, August 20). Tilsen facing new charges, up to 17 years in prison ahead of preliminary hearing. *Rapid City Journal*.  
[https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/tilsen-facing-new-charges-up-to-17-years-in-prison-ahead-of-preliminary-hearing/article\\_5cb929fb-c870-54cb-8163-78e90eb42ede.html](https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/tilsen-facing-new-charges-up-to-17-years-in-prison-ahead-of-preliminary-hearing/article_5cb929fb-c870-54cb-8163-78e90eb42ede.html)
- Zoints, A. (2021, January 23). South Dakotans react after Keystone XL permit is cancelled. *Rapid City Journal*. [https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/south-dakotans-react-after-keystone-xl-permit-is-cancelled/article\\_edd41bd3-60e5-5ef4-975b-4fe974e7bb33.html](https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/south-dakotans-react-after-keystone-xl-permit-is-cancelled/article_edd41bd3-60e5-5ef4-975b-4fe974e7bb33.html)

## Appendix: Interview Guide

<p>Part 1: Relationship building and logistics</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offer gratitude</li> <li>2. Share about self and what brought me to this work</li> <li>3. Ask participant about what drew them to participate in this study</li> <li>4. Allow participant to choose a pseudonym</li> <li>5. Share consent form, participant rights, etc.</li> <li>6. Ask the participant if they have any concerns, requests, etc.</li> <li>7. Ask for permission to begin recording the interview.</li> </ol>
<p>Part 2: Interpretation of current and historical education policies (subquestion 2)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Current state of educational policy             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What do you perceive to be the biggest policies impacting your experience as a teacher/student/parent/Elder/etc.</li> <li>b. What do you think needs to be done to improve education?</li> <li>c. What do you think is going well in education?</li> <li>d. What are your thoughts on the current political climate of education in South Dakota?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Historical policies             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What was education like/has education been like for you?</li> <li>b. If you could go back in time and change one thing about education in the past, what would it be and why?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p>Part 3: Self-Determination (subquestion 3)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you define self-determination?</li> <li>2. What is your vision/hope for your future/your students' futures?</li> <li>3. What is your vision/hope for the future of Indigenous education in South Dakota?</li> <li>4. What role do you find yourself playing in creating this future? Is it the role you want to play?</li> <li>5. What challenges do you experience as you live into this role?</li> <li>6. What excites you about this role?</li> <li>7. How do policies inform how you do your job?</li> <li>8. What do you do when you disagree with a policy (use example of state Social Studies standards if participant needs a point of reference)?</li> <li>9. What do you do when you agree with a policy (use example of state Social Studies standards if participant needs a point of reference)?</li> <li>10. Are there other things that inform how you decide to act in response to a policy?</li> </ol>