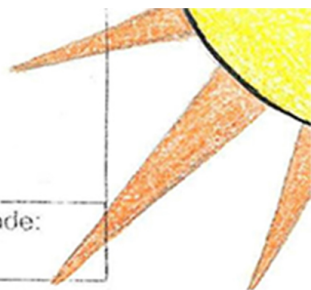


Public School
Q4 Report Card



Student Name:

Form ID:

Home Room:

Grade:

Grade Detail

Course ID	Course Title	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Gr 7	Gr 8	Gr 9	Gr 10	Gr 11	Gr 12	Final Grade
7300CP	Math: Compacted Yr 1	A	A	A										0.00
	Comment(s) Fantastic work!!													
5403	Physical Science	A	A											0.00
	Comment(s) Great work in science class													
5200MW	Medieval World Studies	A	A											0.00
7100	Language Arts 7	A	B	B										0.00
	Comment(s) Add a (-) to the grade Pleasure to have in class. Have a great summer!													
79501	Technology 7	A												
MS1201AY11	Spanish 1	A												
59501	Technology		P											
5961	Academic Support													0.00
7100	Language Arts 7		A											0.00
			A											0.00
		B	A											0.00
79501	Technology 7		A	A	A									0.00
55024	Health	P												

Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools

Leilani Sabzalian



INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S SURVIVANCE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools examines the cultural, social, and political terrain of Indigenous education by providing accounts of Indigenous students and educators creatively navigating the colonial dynamics within public schools. Through a series of survivance stories, the book surveys a range of educational issues, including implementation of Native-themed curriculum, teachers' attempts to support Native students in their classrooms, and efforts to claim physical and cultural space in a school district, among others. As a collective, these stories highlight the ways that colonization continues to shape Native students' experiences in schools. By documenting the nuanced intelligence, courage, artfulness, and survivance of Native students, families, and educators, the book counters deficit framings of Indigenous students. The goal is also to develop educators' anticolonial literacy so that teachers can counter colonialism and better support Indigenous students in public schools.

Leilani Sabzalian (Alutiiq) is an Assistant Professor of Indigenous Studies in Education at the University of Oregon.

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INTRODUCTION

The stories of *survivance* are elusive, obscure, and rightfully imprecise by ordinary definitions, translations, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice. The nature of survivance is unmistakable by native storiers, and the stories create a sense of presence, natural reason, active traditions, narrative resistance, and continental liberty, clearly observable in personal attributes, such as humor, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance necessitates an active sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry.

Gerald Vizenor, 2007, pp. 12–13

...*survivance* subtly reduces the power of the destroyer. [Vizenor] seizes on *survivance's* older sense of *succession*, orienting its connotations not toward loss but renewal and continuity into the future rather than memorializing the past.

Karl Kroeber, 2008, p. 25

Mainstream media and dominant discourses routinely and stubbornly portray Indigenous peoples as vanished, as victims, or as broken and damaged (Tuck, 2009), yet Native survivance is a persistent feature of Indigenous communities. Native courage, creativity, intelligence, determination, and artfulness—acts of Native survivance—are our inheritance and our legacy as Indigenous peoples. I typically resist generalizations about Indigenous peoples because, as Mvskoke Creek scholar Tsianina Lomawaima (1999) states, “so many stereotypes rest on the mistaken assumption that all Indians are alike” (p. 5); but here—because I believe it is true, and also because I believe Indigenous peoples deserve, perhaps even need, to hear it—I draw from Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor’s work to emphasize survivance as “invariably true and just in native practice,” and “unmistakable by native stories.” Saying this does not mean all Indigenous peoples are the same. The active, creative, future-oriented practices and praxes of Indigenous peoples are as diverse Indigenous peoples themselves. But saying Native survivance is a

2 Colonialism in the Classroom

fact—whether in its enactment or its potential—provides an important antidote to the erasure and deficit narratives that chase and displace Indigenous peoples. At times, survivance is practically imperceptible: a desire about the world, a feeling or instinct one follows, a refusal to let something go unnoticed. On other occasions, survivance is momentous: the resistance at Standing Rock, for example, which was a reminder to the world and each other of our presence, power, and creativity as Indigenous peoples. As this book will show, survivance is a diverse, yet persistent feature of Indigenous education. It surfaces in Native students' observations about their curriculum, or Native educators' creativity as they circumvent institutional resistance. Survivance emerges in the everyday acts of Native students, families, and educators as they create spaces of possibility within public schools. Survivance surfaces in my own writing and storytelling as I try to imagine more promising practices of Indigenous education. It is said that intergenerational trauma is inherited, a colonial legacy passed on through our DNA. This book posits that whether or not this is true, survivance is a legacy we inherit as Indigenous peoples. Indigenous children, and those who teach them, should know this.

Recognizing Native survivance means recognizing the various ways Indigenous peoples continue to chart meaningful futures for ourselves in spite of colonial violence, and telling stories of how Native youth, families, and educators carve out spaces of survivance within and in spite of US Indian policy, in spaces such as Indian education.¹ Indian education has often meant colonial education *for*, not *by*, Native peoples (Lomawaima, 2002)—federal boarding schools, on-reservation day schools, or mission schools, for example, that sought to assimilate Indigenous children into colonial values, practices, and ideals. But even within assimilative colonial policies and institutions, Indigenous survivance has persisted. “Indian self-education has survived under tremendous duress” (Lomawaima, 1999, p. 5). Further, Indigenous peoples have consistently demanded more from public educational institutions. The Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975, for example, exemplify movements and acts of survivance, and were important shifts in Indian education. Countless Indigenous educators, families, and allies testified to the Special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education about the travesty of Indian education, a travesty recognized in 4,077 pages of hearings and 450 pages of committee print that were distilled into the Kennedy Report.² Such advocacy led Senator Kennedy to call Indian education a “national disgrace” (U.S. Congress, 1969, p. 3) and to advocate strongly for Indigenous control of education. The Indian Education Act established the Office of Indian Education and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education, as well as the template for the Indian Education formula grant program to support Native students in public schools. As this book will show, the act has not guaranteed the type of education Indigenous educators advocated for, yet the movement nevertheless made stark the devastating impact of prior colonial forms of education, and provided a formal mechanism for Indigenous families and educators to provide input to shape educational priorities and processes. And despite the routine marginalization of Indian education in public school districts,

Native educators and families continue to leverage this movement in service of educational self-determination.

It was within a space made possible by the Indian Education Act that a group of us—Indigenous families, students, and educators—in a small, urban school district, began reclaiming space for Indigenous students. In 2012, we started a weekly after-school youth group within the Title VI/Indian Education program, a space where Indigenous students and families could be in community together and define our own educational priorities and practices. It wasn't long before we could see clear benefits to our group and to the program. Students involved had opportunities to form healthy relationships with their peers, develop positive cultural identities, engage with Native literature, sharpen their critical literacy skills, and participate in meaningful place- and culture-based education. The program also provided the opportunity for participating Indigenous parents and family members to meet each other and network. Importantly, it was this networking that enabled organizing that led to securing further grant funding to establish a Native youth center, a necessity given the roadblocks we faced as a community without a permanent home. Since the establishment of the center, the Indian Education program has grown considerably, and now includes a weekly preschool program that integrates Native language into literacy activities, a culture camp for students during summer and winter breaks, and a first foods program where students learn to harvest, prepare, and preserve traditional foods. The program growth has been promising and exciting.³

As programs expanded, students and parents would comment on how they appreciated the opportunities afforded by the after-school programs and the center. However, I also heard more frequent reports about patronizing representations of Indigenous people in curriculum, racist microaggressions with teachers and school parents, and moments of exclusion and silence. The increasing frequency of these reports was not a surprise. We had created a space with a majority of Indigenous students and families where it was “safe to be Indigenous on *Indigenous terms*” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2014b, p. 9). People felt comfortable expressing experiences in these spaces they would not elsewhere. It was natural that we would be hearing such stories. Because stories helped me understand the contexts and contestations of colonialism students and families negotiated, it felt natural to represent the issues facing Indigenous students, families, and educators via stories. To do so, I drew from a longstanding Indigenous tradition of storytelling, complemented by critical race scholarship.

Survivance Storytelling

Survivance storytelling is my attempt to engage in a practice of critical and responsible storytelling. Survivance stories are both descriptive and interventive. My hope is that by documenting the racial and colonial dynamics Native students and families navigate, as well as the nuanced intelligence, courage, artfulness, and survivance they employ as they navigate those dynamics, educators will critically

examine what it means to teach in colonial contexts and teach toward Indigenous self-determination.

The stories families began sharing of their educational experiences were laced with colonialism and survivance. Thus, survivance stories are characterized by their attention to colonialism but also to the varied practices of survivance within those experiences. Survivance draws attention to Indigenous peoples' "active sense of presence" (Vizenor, 1999, p. vii) and creative negotiations amidst colonial dispossession. As Vizenor offers, Native survivance is "not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry. (p. vii). Survivance stories intervene into discourses that have long pathologized Indigenous lives—savage, primitive, vanishing, damaged, victim—and instead reflect Indigenous peoples' "active resistance and repudiation of dominance" (Vizenor, 2008, p. 11). Survivance—Native peoples' power to refuse colonial scripts of erasure or victimization, and instead creatively confront, resist, decenter, disrupt, and transform those scripts in various ways, big and small—is a central theme of this book.

Survivance describes our communal self-determination to reclaim space in a school district and create a Native youth center, an effort rooted in "fierce Native advocacy for 'places of difference' within and outside of schools where the profound range of diversity that characterizes Native America could be appreciated, nurtured, and recognized" (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2014b, p. 4). But survivance can also manifest in small ways—a Native educator's commitment to educate teachers and students in the district regardless of her routine marginalization, a light-skinned Native student's desire for recognition in her classroom, even my own methodological commitment to a "Native feminist reading practice" of "reading survivance from a place of survivance" (Morrill, 2017, p. 15). Each survivance story in this book is an attempt to reflect back the courage, commitment, and continuity of Native students, educators, and community members that I have witnessed.

My practice of survivance storytelling borrows theories and methods from the field of Critical race theory (CRT), and in particular, counterstorytelling methodologies (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), however the stories, practices, and theories of survivance existed long before this. Survivance storytelling is akin to counterstorytelling, a theoretically grounded approach to research rooted in Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), yet survivance storytelling is aspirational in a distinct way—it specifically foregrounds colonization and aims to further Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty.

Though indebted to the work of critical race scholarship, survivance stories are more explicitly grounded in Lumbee scholar Bryan Brayboy's (2005) theory of Tribal Critical Race Theory (hereafter TribalCrit), which calls for approaches to research that center Indigenous issues, knowledges, aims, and methods. Like CRT, TribalCrit challenges the neutrality of the field of education and centers the experiences and stories of those marginalized by educational systems. However, TribalCrit revises a central assumption of CRT—that racism is endemic to society—by recognizing that colonization precedes and produces race. TribalCrit

recognizes that racism impacts Indigenous students, but “colonization and its debilitating influences are at the heart of TribalCrit; all other ideas are offshoots of this vital concept” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 431). Importantly, TribalCrit also centers Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous political identities, and Indigenous aims of self-determination and sovereignty. A brief summary of TribalCrit’s nine central tenets include the following:

- Colonization is endemic to society.
- US policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
- Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
- Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
- The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
- Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
- Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
- Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
- Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 429–430)

Survivance storytelling, rooted in TribalCrit, engages a practice of counterstorytelling that takes into account the important affordances of Indigenous traditions of thought and Indigenous studies. Storytelling is a longstanding Indigenous tradition (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy, 2005; Drabek, 2012; Million, 2014). As Million (2014) writes, “*Story is Indigenous theory*” (p. 35). Survivance storytelling, grounded in “the power of our everyday stories, the theory of stories as theory, and Indigenism as theory” (Million, 2014, p. 32), recasts counterstorytelling within a longstanding tradition of Native resistance discourse (LaRocque, 2010) and “writing back” (Smith, 2012).

Like counterstories, survivance stories aim to disrupt, decenter, and destabilize “master narratives” of education (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2002).⁴ They also “seek to challenge the assumptions of power and Eurocentric notions of normativity” and the “taken-for-granted assumptions of racial neutrality with/in the world” (Atwood & López, 2014, pp. 1144–1145). Like counterstories, they also aim to “cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 159). Beyond these “destructive” (Delgado, 1989) functions, survivance stories, like counterstories, are also intended to be generative, creative, and pedagogical. Survivance storytelling

describes our practice at the Native youth center of sharing stories and experiences that contest, decenter, or defy colonial norms and expectations. “Storytelling and counterstorytelling these experiences” Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue, “can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (p. 32). Among those marginalized by dominant discourses, counterstories can foster a sense of community, reduce isolation, and function as a form of healing and liberation (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

While borrowing from counterstorytelling methodologies, my method of storytelling is situated within the longstanding tradition of Native counterstorytelling from educational activists like Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Dakota). Her writing featured in the *Atlantic Monthly* in the late 19th and early 20th century, as well as her book *American Indian Stories* (1921) provided counterstories to Richard Henry Pratt’s *Indian Helper* and *The Red Man* columns, that advertised boarding schools as education that “transformed the Indian from savage to civilized” (Enoch, 2002, p. 126). Zitkala-Ša’s writing reversed the “white = civilized, Indian = savage script” (p. 126), and she “used her essays to erase this script and inscribe her own version of this narrative” (p. 124). In some instances, she reversed this narrative to tell “civilized” narratives of her “savage” home life. In others, she rescripted the school’s “civilizing” techniques as cruel and savage, highlighting “the hypocrisy and injustice that she witnessed” as both a student in a boarding school, and later “as a teacher at Carlisle” (Enoch, 2002, p. 133). Importantly, however, Zitkala-Ša was not just engaged in a practice of resistance, but also what Leech Lake Ojibwe scholar Scott Lyons (2000) refers to as “rhetorical sovereignty,” a literary practice of Native survivance and presence that contests colonialism and creates space for Indigenous self-determination. My work draws from rhetorical models like hers to point out the colonial assumptions and contradictions that underpin policies and practices purportedly designed to serve Native children. I do so while also trying to imagine and infuse other educational trajectories that such policies and practices foreclose.

Survivance stories draw specific attention to the intersections of education and colonization (Brayboy, 2005; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) while also recognizing “there is a danger in allowing *colonization* to be the only story of Indigenous lives” (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 601). There is a tendency in research, warns Unanga’s scholar Eve Tuck (2009), that overemphasizing “historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy” (p. 413) can lead to the idea that “oppression singularly defines a community” (p. 413). This is not only an ineffective and unreliable theory of change, but can lead to “the long-term repercussions of *thinking of ourselves as broken*” (p. 409). To navigate the ethical and representational decisions inherent in my desire to make visible colonial dynamics while also telling stories responsibly, I draw from Indigenous theories of refusal (A. Simpson, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2014a) and desire (Tuck, 2009).

wall. Success has meant getting librarians to realize that *redsk*n* and *sq*w* are derogatory terms that have no place in children's literature, or getting teachers to talk about Indigenous peoples in the present tense. Success has meant getting a teacher to realize that Indigenous students don't all have dark skin, or even just that Indigenous education matters. In such moments, when these become my measures of success, I question my investments and theories of change. I worry about who I am investing in and where I am locating the power to transform Indigenous education. I see the promise in Indigenous community-based charter schools and Indigenous teacher preparation programs. Yet I also worry about abandoning the Indigenous students who have few options but to be educated in these spaces. My work in these spaces often feels compromising, but so too does the thought of conceding the terrain of public schooling. Doing so feels like another form of removal and erasure.

It remains an open question for me whether the public schools in this district and in general are capable of educating for democracy, self-determination, and sovereignty. It also remains open whether teacher education programs and individual teachers will care enough to take Indigenous educational issues and priorities seriously. Nevertheless, by "assert[ing] a Native gaze on a racially contested landscape" (Deyhle, 2013, p. 6) of public schools and "counterimagining" (Kroeber, 2008, p. 29) educational possibilities from within, my goal is to pry open possibilities for educators and enlist them in anticolonial and Indigenous education efforts in mainstream public schools and classrooms. By bringing Native studies theories and frameworks to bear on a particular set of educational experiences in this district, these stories are a "strategic contestation" (LaRocque, 2010, p. 24) of what I have both participated in and witnessed, my attempt to address both "the *not yet* and, at times, the *not any-more*" (Tuck, 2009, p. 417).

To summarize, survivance storytelling is a method I constructed as I negotiated my role, relationships, and responsibilities as an Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous youth and families in this district. Writing survivance stories has been my way of contesting colonialism, reflecting and affirming the Native survivance that I witnessed in my research, and connecting to the long legacy of Native survivance of which I am a part. As I mentioned earlier, my emphasis on survivance is not intended to be the latest iteration of grit. My aim in sharing this method is not to arm a new generation of researchers who now seek to inquire into and document Native survivance. I do hope, however, that Indigenous students, educators, and researchers find this description useful, and draw from this or develop their own methods to reflect, affirm, and make connections to our shared legacy.

Outline of Chapters

Each survivance story in this book documents a particular educational experience and the chapters stand alone. However, to facilitate reading these stories, I have divided the book into two parts, and included a section description that provides a brief overview each chapter.

Part I, “Colonialism in the Classroom,” includes three chapters, each of which addresses educational experience at the classroom level. Chapter 1, “Pilgrims and Invented Indians,” documents a 7-year old Native student’s experience of and resistance to the conventional Pilgrims and Indians curriculum in an elementary classroom. Chapter 2, “Halloween Costumes and Native Identity,” represents a Native youth group’s organizing around issues of representation during Halloween, and in particular, one Native youth’s attempt to bring that knowledge to her classroom teacher. Lastly, Chapter 3, “Native Sheroes and Complex Personhood” is about contemporary Indigenous peoples and identity.

Part II, “Colonialism in the Culture of Schools,” includes three chapters that each take a broader view of curriculum by attending to school-wide and community-based curricular efforts. Chapter 4, “Little Anthropologists” tackles the Native American Unit typically taught in schools across the United States, and questions the type of knowledge students gain from this type of curriculum. Chapter 5, “Native Heritage Month,” documents a school assembly that takes place during Native Heritage Month, and interrogates the value of Native performances. Finally, Chapter 6, “Education on the Border of Sovereignty,” represents a high school mural project created in consultation with Native nations.

Taken together, these chapters point to various forms of knowledge teachers need to better serve Native students and families. A theme that comes up clearly, particularly in the first few chapters, is that teachers should know better and do better by Native students. Building on this assumption, the chapters then move to how educators might more responsibly educate Native students, and draw from Indigenous studies to inform their curriculum and pedagogy. Although these stories are particular to this place, my hope is that educators make connections to their own contexts and practices, reflect on how their own teaching reproduces colonialism, and enlist themselves in the struggle to support Indigenous self-determination in schools. We need *all* educators to see themselves as responsible for this work. As Vaught (2011) argues, “It should not be an accident or stroke of good fortune that a Black or Brown [or Native] child receives a good education. It should be a systemic, structural guarantee” (p. 209).

The final chapter, “Interventions for Urban Indigenous Education,” summarizes some of the more general insights and recommendations that emerge from the survivance stories for schools and districts, teacher education programs, educational policy, and research. The book ends with a brief vignette, documenting a community effort premised on survivance, exploring the ways that survivance is often improvisational, using the resources at hand to support Native students despite, at times, dire circumstances.

Notes

- 1 Over the years, Indian Education has been located under various “Title” programs. In 1994, Indian Education was reauthorized as Title IX Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Under the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB),