

## ***Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools***

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### **Core Themes Addressed in the Book**

Indigenous education	Indigenous identities	teacher knowledge	K-12 curriculum
research methodologies	Eurocentrism	stereotypes	social studies
settler colonialism	racism	microaggressions	Halloween
youth resistance	whiteness	cultural appropriation	Thanksgiving
survivance	marginalization	responsibility	Native American units
sovereignty	Native nationhood	anticolonial literacy	Native Heritage Month

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### **Questions and Quotes for Consideration (by chapter):**

#### ***Preface***

- ◇ This chapter provides context for the concepts of *settler colonialism* and *survivance*. Consider the quotes below, as well as the examples highlighted in the preface, and share how you have seen colonialism and survivance operate in *epic* and *everyday* ways in your own social or educational context.

“Survivance describes ‘Indigenous creative approaches to life beyond genocide, beyond the bareness of survival’ (Morrill, 2017, p. 15), signifying ‘a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry’ (Vizenor, 2007, pp. 12–13)” (p. xv).

“Just as settler colonialism can operate in both extraordinary and ordinary ways, stories and practices of survivance simultaneously surface in the epic and the everyday” (p. xv).

#### ***Introduction***

- ◇ This chapter draws on the scholarship of Eve Tuck (Unangax) to forward survivance storytelling as a *desire-based* research method, a way of countering the *damage-based* narratives that circulate in society and schools about Indigenous peoples. In what ways can this theory of desire inform your own work?
- ◇ This chapter answers three questions posed by anticolonial scholar Leigh Patel in relation to educational research: Why this? Why me? Why now and why here? (pp. 13 – 28). Consider a research or educational project you are working on, preferably one that involves Indigenous issues, and answer these three questions in relation to your work.
- ◇ What might “locally responsive research” look like in your own educational or professional context? (p. 26)
- ◇ Native students are often a statistical minority in K-12 schools and universities; nevertheless, public schools and universities should be accountable to Native students and communities (p. 27). Practice articulating why Native programs and services are important in public schools and universities, even when there are few students.
- ◇ A central method in this book is the use of *disruptive daydreaming* forwarded by Susan Dion (Lenape/Potawotami) and the question “*What if?*” posed by Adrienne Rich (p. 8). Both are used in an effort to imagine “what would have to be done for things to be otherwise?” *What if* a teacher had taught... *What if* a school had done... Consider ways that *disruptive daydreaming* and the question *what if* might help you consider new educational possibilities in your own context.

## ***Chapter 1: Pilgrims and Invented Indians***

- ◇ This chapter includes a discussion of terminology and the quest by teachers for the “correct term.” As noted in the preface, this quest for the correct term is a challenge because “As Cherokee author Thomas King (2012) writes, ‘the fact of the matter is there has never been a good collective noun because there never was a collective to begin with (p. xiii)’” (p. xvi). In your own words, talk about why it is important to use accurate and respectful terminology, while also recognizing the limits of such a task.
- ◇ Read the quote below, and consider ways that an “affinity” or “adoration” with white/settler characters has been cultivated in your own educational context. Why might this affinity/adoration be dangerous? What steps can you take to disrupt this adoration/affinity?

The danger in this narrative, echoing Wahpetunwan Dakota scholar Waziyatawin Angela Cavender Wilson’s (2006) critique of *Little House on the Prairie*, is that

... the whites in the story are glorified. One of the most dangerous aspects of the book, therefore, is the extent to which the reader develops an affinity with and adoration of the white characters in the story. (p. 72)

- ◇ This chapter illustrates the ways that curriculum often “faces West”—narratives of discovery, exploration, expansion, or settlement, for example. In what ways does the curriculum that you teach “face West”? How might you reposition your curriculum so that it “faces East”? (pp. 52-53).

## ***Chapter 2: Halloween Costume and Native Identity***

- ◇ One of the Native students in the youth group was excited to bring her critical analyses of cultural appropriation to her teacher, but her teacher had a hard time understanding why this issue was such a “big deal” to this student. In education, important moments are often “missed” or “dismissed.” Consider a time that you tried to raise a concern to someone and were misunderstood or dismissed. Conversely, think about a time someone might have raised an issue that was important to them, but you had difficulty understanding/empathizing with their concerns. Reflect on the ways power impacts this dynamic (e.g., a student being dismissed by their teacher, a worker being dismissed by their supervisor).
- ◇ “Racial and colonial microaggressions, though often jarring in the moment, are a familiar feature of Indigenous students’ educational experiences, and accumulate as an expected part of school and classroom climates” (p. 71). For this reason, counterspaces can offer Indigenous students a space for respite, healing, storytelling, and community amidst the harm they often experience in schools/universities. Counterspaces can reflect, affirm, and hold space for the struggles, experiences, needs, and aspirations of communities that are marginalized. What counterspaces exist in your context? How can you cultivate counterspaces? Discuss the tensions between finding respite/healing/communities on the margin, and not wanting to remain marginalized? (Said differently, in what ways might counterspaces be counterproductive, or used by schools/universities to avoid the harder work of creating a sense of belonging and affirmation throughout a school/campus?)
- ◇ This chapter suggests that “anticipating, interrupting, and responding to such microaggressions becomes an unfortunate, yet necessary, aspect of supporting

Indigenous students” (p. 71). Unfortunately, while microaggressions are often clearly hurtful to those who experience them, they are also often subtle, even invisible, to those who inflict them. Think about a time you experienced a microaggression and the person who inflicted it was unaware. Or think about a time you learned about a microaggression you had unwittingly committed. What strategies can you use to anticipate microaggressions? What strategies can you use to recognize the subtle ways you might unwittingly harm someone? What strategies can you use to respond to someone (a teacher, a colleague, a parent) who takes part in racial/colonial microaggressions?

### ***Chapter 3: Native Heroes and Complex Personhood***

- ◇ Even young children are aware of dominant discourses of Indianness, the deep-seated ideas of what “real Indians” should look like, which often involves dark skin, long hair, and cultural markers like feathers or regalia. Discuss ways you can counter the one-dimensional representations of Indianness. How can you create an educational context that reflects and affirms the diversity and complexity of Indigenous identities?
- ◇ As Paris and Alim document, “youth enact cultural and linguistic dexterity, fashioning fluid identities and cultural expression that embody traditions, while also extending them” (p. 101). However, Alim reminds us that youth can also revoice or reproduce “racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and xenophobic discourses” (p. 102). As teachers, how can we create affirming spaces honor youths’ cultural literacy, while also cultivating critical literacy? How can we “productively create space for students to identify with as well as critically reflect on particular cultural expressions and practices”? (p. 101).
- ◇ Avery Gordon uses the term “complex personhood” to describe a the diverse range of human experiences that exists in each of our lives, a range that is “simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning” (p. 109). Read the passage on pages 108-109 and consider the ways you embody complex personhood. Consider the convictions and contradictions that exist in your life. Consider ways that you can recognize the complex personhood of others. What would a classroom look like that recognized the complex personhood of each student?

### ***Chapter 4: Little Anthropologists***

- ◇ Highlighting the widespread popularity of “Native American Units” in elementary social studies, this chapter argues that Indigenous peoples are often positioned as “objects of study” in curriculum. Drawing from the chapter, discuss why society and schools seem to be so invested in these multicultural frameworks and activities.
- ◇ Reflecting on the possibilities and limits of Indigenous representations in museums, Paul Chaat Smith ultimately questioned the goal of creating more accurate or respectful representations. After reading the quote below, which questions whether Indigenous peoples should even be in museums at all, consider other goals that may need to be questioned/reframed/upended.

A few years ago I had the chance to visit a number of museums, interpretive centers, and heritage centers in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. I was fortunate enough to get a backstage tour of the redesigned Natural History Museum in the capital city, Regina. The staff had completely rethought and redesigned the wing of the museum dealing with Indians. They consulted with Native people and hired Indians to paint and construct exhibits; I was especially

impressed with a beautiful display of a modern canvas sweat lodge. Another had Indians in a tipi with a dog sled out front, and next to that there were Indians in a cabin with a snowmobile out front. In these exhibits we managed not to be extinct.

I left the tour with nothing but respect for the efforts of a staff that obviously had thought long and hard about how to represent Indian culture. At the same time, for me the nagging question remained: *Why are we in this museum at all?* (p. 24, emphasis added) (pp. 132-133)

- ◇ To counter the objectification of Indigenous culture, this chapter argues that curriculum should instead be grounded in recognition and respect for Native nations. How can you incorporate a grounding of recognition and respect for Native nations into your curriculum/educational context?

### ***Chapter 5: Native Heritage Month***

- ◇ Advocates for Native Heritage Month have argued that they offer an important placeholder to teach about Native issues, experiences, and curriculum that might otherwise be erased or ignored during the school year. However, some argue that Native Heritage Month can absolve educators of their responsibilities to address Native issues and curriculum year round, marginalizing the very people, issues, experiences, and curriculum they are seeking to center. What possibilities do you see for Native Heritage Month? What tensions or limits do you see in this approach to social and curricular change?
- ◇ In this story, Mr. Barry thoughtfully mediated the ways he anticipated being read by students at the assembly. His assertions—"I don't wear this outfit every day. I don't live in a tipi or in the mountains. I didn't come here on a horse. I drive a Honda. I get asked those three questions every time."—were an expression of what DuBois refers to as "double consciousness," or sense of seeing himself "through the eyes of others" (Du Bois, 1961, p. 17). What experiences do you have with double consciousness? How do you think educators could have prepared students to see Barry the way Barry sees himself?
- ◇ Drawing on Cherokee Thomas King's typology of Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians, this chapter highlighted the strong educational desire to incorporate Dead Indians as multicultural curriculum. Considering the quote below, discuss the ways performances can often function as entertainment, rather than instilling in those who take part a sense of responsibility to Indigenous peoples and issues.

It doesn't feel good to know one has benefited from and continues to be complicit in dispossession. The curricular focus on Dead Indians is driven by such tacit desires—for innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012), for superficial efforts at multiculturalism that leave Eurocentrism intact, or for comfort. Perhaps this is why curricular activities for Native Heritage Month more often involve invitations to Native dancers to perform, rather than invitations to tribal chairwomen who might remind students and teachers of their tenuous claims to place. (p. 165)

- ◇ The discussion of Yakama students involved in the dance club and the Rock-Your-Mocs assembly at Warm Springs illuminated the possibilities of centering Native students

during this month, rather than educating the broader public. Discuss the limits and possibilities of this frame.

### ***Chapter 6: Education on the Border of Sovereignty***

- ◇ Consider the following quote, and discuss what it means to think of Indigenous peoples as subjects, rather than objects:

Sharon's requests were continually rooted in desires to learn *about* Native people, but we continued to reflect back ways that she could learn *from* Native people. She asked for cultural objects (flute music or NW coast style designs); we gave her pedagogical subjects (contemporary musicians and artists who spoke against their objectification). (pp. 189-190)

- ◇ One teacher involved in the mural project said she was frustrated because “we wanted [the mural] to honor Native American people, but we didn’t want it to just be a ‘bland nature scene.’” (p. 189). Discuss how the mural, despite its lack of Native representation, did honor Native peoples.
- ◇ Cultivating partnerships and sharing power with tribal nations is one strategy offered in this chapter to enhance Indigenous education. Describe ways you think tribal nations and the school/institution you work at could meaningfully partner and share power. What possibilities might this generate? What challenges do you anticipate?

### ***Conclusion: Interventions for Urban Indigenous Education***

- ◇ The conclusion highlighted Nick Thompson’s discussion of Apache storytelling, in which he used a hunting metaphor—“stalking with stories”—to capture the power, methods, and purpose of stories. Drawing on this metaphor, this book was offered as “a practice of research that has stalked the mainstream educational practices in public schools that continue to underserve Indigenous students and undermine Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty” (p. 200). What mainstream educational practices do you think need to be stalked in public schools and universities?
- ◇ A variety of recommendations were offered to support teachers, institutions, educational policy, and educational research. Choose a recommendation that you think you could implement, and discuss how you might do so. Choose a recommendation that you think is challenging, and discuss why it may not feel feasible to you. If you were to add a recommendation to the list after reading the book, what would it be?
- ◇ The final story, Native Love, offers an example of a project that sought to counter violence against women, yet also seemed to “crumble under the lived and real violence it was supposed to address” (p. 228). Discuss the tensions between enacting projects of hope and possibility amidst the reality that we cannot always protect our students and communities from the harm we are trying to address and prevent. What power do symbolic projects offer? How can we maintain hope as educators despite the hardship that we face, and that we know our youth and families face as well?