

**Past to Present Reflections: Reclaiming Indigenous Education Through Relationships,
Sovereignty, and Systemic Change in Kansas**

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Abstract

This qualitative dissertation examines how Indigenous-centered professional development influences K–12 educators’ understandings and classroom practices related to Indigenous peoples, sovereignty, and curriculum in Kansas. This study considers the persistent erasure and historical framing of Tribal Nations within Kansas curriculum guidelines, where Indigenous peoples are often represented only in the past rather than as contemporary sovereign nations. Grounded in the work of the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE), this research explores educators’ approaches to engaging with Indigenous-centered professional development designed to support more accurate, relational, and sovereignty-centered teaching practices. Using a qualitative research method informed by Indigenous Storywork and the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM), the study draws on semi-structured interviews with four Kansas educators who participated in KACIE professional development. Data analysis centered relational accountability through the Four Rs: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. Findings uncovered five major themes: a shift from historical removal narratives toward contemporary Indigenous resilience; increased educator confidence through Indigenous-led professional development; greater integration of tribal sovereignty into the curriculum; stronger relational accountability to Indigenous students and communities; and recognition of institutional obstacles that limit sustained implementation. Ultimately, the study shows that Indigenous-led professional development can move educators beyond superficial inclusion toward transformational and action-driven practices that uphold Indigenous sovereignty, educational equity, and systemic change in K–12 education.

Keywords: Indigenous education, Indigenous storywork, Tribal Sovereignty, Indigenous-centered professional development, Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model, Indigenous pedagogy

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During my service in the United States Navy, I was standing mid-watch aboard the USS Belleau Wood LHA-3 when a fellow sailor discovered that I was Native American. They asked if I was ‘really Native American.’ I responded that I am Ihanktonwan (Yankton Sioux). They paused and said, ‘I learned about you in social studies.’ Curious, I asked, “What did you learn?” They replied confidently, ‘You’re hunter-gatherers. You live in tipis, hunt buffalo, and don’t have electricity.’

I laughed, not because it was humorous, but because it revealed something deeply troubling. They were not attempting to insult me; they were reciting what formal schooling had taught them. They then asked, sincerely, “Do you all live in tipis?” I told them yes and let the silence stretch for a moment. The confusion on their face revealed the rigidity of the narrative they had internalized. Eventually, I clarified: “We live like everyone else. We have houses, vehicles, electricity, and televisions.” I added, “Don’t let the social studies textbooks fool you.”

This story illustrates how Indigenous peoples are frequently positioned in the past within the K–12 curriculum. My shipmate’s understanding of Native nations was frozen in a pre-contact or early colonial framework. They had been taught about Indigenous peoples, but not about contemporary Indigenous nations. The issue was not their ignorance alone; it was systemic. Their education had constructed Indigenous identity as historical, static, and primitive. This framing continues to shape how Indigenous students are perceived and how Indigenous sovereignty is understood in contemporary America.

Extending beyond my story, my educational experience has further highlighted the structural inequalities I experienced while attending high school in South Dakota. My high school is located on the Yankton Sioux Reservation. One might assume that language and

culture would be part of the curriculum; however, I didn't hear our language or culture until my freshman year. During my time there, I experienced racial and stereotypical behavior, and adults made me feel like I was only worthy of a tough life on the reservation. Dr. John Tippeconnic III's (Grande, 2015) quote resonates with me and my experiences in public school.

Formal education with the enclosed walls of schools continues to be a forceful weapon used by dominant powers to create boundaries to control and mold the minds of youth and adults, to eradicate or weaken their Indigenous identity, and to assimilate them into mainstream society. (p. 36)

I didn't realize this until I attended Haskell Indian Nations University and learned about Native American history from Indigenous perspectives. That's when I understood I had been lied to, not only by the public school system, but also by teachers who systematically spread inaccuracies about Native American people and histories. As Absolon (2022) writes, "I felt insecure and intimidated by research. It was only when I started to read about colonization in university that I had 'holy shit' moments" (p. 79). This was my 'ah-ha' moment in shifting how I see myself as an enrolled citizen of the Ihanktonwan (Yankton Sioux Tribe).

My journey from experiencing educational inequities at my high school and then later recognizing the systemic erasure of Indigenous history at Haskell Indian Nations University has fundamentally shaped my understanding of education and strengthened my commitment to reform. As a result of this 'ah-ha' moment, I am an active member of the Kansas Advisory Council on Indian Education (KACIE). In February 2022, the Kansas Education Commissioner came under fire for making a racist and derogatory comment about Native Americans during a virtual professional education conference. They recounted a story from his youth in which they said they tried to convince visiting relatives that they should be "more worried about the Indians

raiding the town” (Motter, 2022) than about tornadoes. This claim played into harmful stereotypes about Indigenous people as violent or threatening. This prompted immediate backlash from tribal leaders, Native educators, legislators, and communities across the state. The Governor and several tribal leaders publicly called for the commissioner’s resignation, arguing that such language undermined efforts to create culturally responsive and respectful educational environments.

In response to this controversy and broader advocacy efforts from tribal nations and Indigenous educators, the Kansas State Board of Education (KSDE) assembled a working group in mid 2022 to advise on issues impacting Indigenous students and Native communities. I first became aware of this work during consultation with the Prairie Band Potawatomi Tribal Council through the Title VI Indian Education program. During that consultation, I learned more about KACIE's development following the 2022 incident involving the commissioner's comments. A Councilman shared that he would inform Dr. Red Corn and recommended that I be added to the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE). KACIE brings together representatives from the four federally recognized tribes in Kansas, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), the Kansas Board of Regents, and key education stakeholders. This quasi-leadership group was created to validate each person’s voice and bring people together. As Montgomery (2025) points out,

When you look around in nature, in creation, you will see many different plants and flowers. All are different but have a role in making the land a healthy place. They do not say that one of them does not belong. They all make room for each other. They depend on each other and make creation beautiful for us. (p. 19)

As I understand KACIE, Dr. Red Corn is central to building relationships with the four tribes, the Kansas State Department of Education, and the Kansas Board of Regents. Dr. Red Corn helped create pathways for meaningful dialogue, consultation, and Indigenous-centered professional development across Kansas school districts. The efforts helped position KACIE not simply as a response to controversy, but as a long-term initiative grounded in relationship-building, sovereignty, and systemic change in Indigenous education in Kansas.

KACIE originally sought to incorporate Indigenous history into the Kansas curriculum, which is reviewed by the state of Kansas once every eight years. However, we decided not to pursue that route due to potential pushback from the state. Instead, we adjusted our strategy and thought critically about how to incorporate Indigenous history into the curriculum accurately. According to Sabzalian et al. (2021), “Kansas is one of fourteen states that did not include Indigenous nationhood at all within their K-12 civics standards” (p. 330). Rather than passively waiting for Kansas’s lengthy curriculum review process, KACIE strategically utilized the appendices section of state standards to incorporate Indigenous voices and histories into classrooms. This approach is supported by professional development for teachers, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge systems and history are accurately depicted and taught in ways that respect the four federally recognized tribes and the tribes with historical ties to Kansas.

After nearly two years of collaboration, the KACIE task force was formally established in April 2024 through a Memorandum of Understanding. We were tasked with centering Tribal Nations and Indigenous voices in the state’s curriculum appendices, ensuring accurate data practices and providing guidance to educators in Kansas. In reviewing the appendices, our goal was to incorporate Indigenous voices and histories into conversations with teachers, and to support them in teaching about Indigenous peoples to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous

students in their classrooms. The appendices allow the KACIE task force to suggest important Indigenous topics for educators to cover. We include these topics with good, actionable intentions that will be followed up with professional development (PD) for teachers. We believe that the PD component is vital.

Teachers and educators with limited knowledge of culturally responsive and relationship-based pedagogy are often unaware of the Indigenous knowledge that children bring into the classroom and of the cultural cues that Indigenous students use to express themselves in the teaching and learning process. (Pewewardy et al., 2021, p. 42)

We hosted a conference at the University of Kansas (KU) that drew teachers from across the state. We served as facilitators, guiding teachers through their thought processes and helping them develop their lesson plans. We enjoyed working with each teacher, and the positive feedback we received was inspiring and motivating. With that said, “state and local Indian Education directors serve as the principal glue to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators” (Pewewardy et al., 2021, p. 42). Furthermore, our work at the KU IndigED summer summit 2025 reinforced the importance of relationship-building and culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Pewewardy (2002), educators should provide “instruction/learning opportunities that are compatible with American Indian/Alaska Native students’ learning style” (p. 23). This suggests that culturally responsive instruction requires educators to understand how Indigenous students learn within their cultural context rather than expecting students to adapt exclusively to dominant educational practices. Such an approach reinforces the importance of professional development that prepares teachers to design learning experiences grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems. By actively guiding educators to

rethink their lesson plans, we helped bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives.

Ultimately, Indian Education directors serve as a vital link between the community and public education systems, and our leadership exemplifies this essential role. Through persistence, collaboration, and innovative strategies, the KACIE task force is advancing systemic change that respects and uplifts Indigenous histories, cultures, and identities within Kansas education. Thus, the purpose of this study was to help educators implement the essential understanding we created.

Statement of Problem

Historically, relationships between Tribal Nations and the United States were formed through treaties, with 370 Indian treaties signed during the 18th and 19th centuries (Williford, 2011). These agreements represented exchanges between sovereigns, in which Native nations provided land, agricultural knowledge, scientific and cultural contributions, and friendship. In return, the U.S. government committed to provisions for health, land use rights, and, importantly, education (Treaty with Yankton Sioux, 1858). For example, the 1858 Treaty with the Yankton Sioux contains provisions in Article 4 for establishing schools, emphasizing the ongoing government-to-government responsibilities. However, the U.S. quickly undermined these commitments through federal legislation and policies. Schools, once promoted as supportive institutions, became places of systemic harm and assimilation (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). A 1969 U.S. Senate report described Native American education as a “national tragedy,” citing deep generational trauma caused by boarding schools that separated children from their families, land, language, and identity (Meriam, 1928; Newland, 2022; U.S. Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969).

The ideology of “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (p. 13), infamously articulated by Richard Henry Pratt, illustrates the assimilationist pedagogy that continues to echo in today’s classrooms (Churchill, 2004). Today, most boarding schools have closed, and approximately 93% of Native students now attend public schools (Fifield, 2016). However, public education continues to fail Native and non-Native students alike by omitting Native perspectives from history curricula. Three-fourths of U.S. states exclude Indian treaties from their standards, and 14 states do not include Indigenous nationhood in any K-12 civics content (Sabzalian et al., 2021). Kansas is among these states, with no post-1900 Indigenous content or graduation requirements tied to Indigenous sovereignty or treaty education (Shear et al., 2015).

To address this educational neglect, we as educators must first understand the complex history of Indian education, which encompasses legal, legislative, and cultural aspects. Indigenous people have long relied on observation, intergenerational knowledge, and their connection to the natural world to inform their learning. In this context, educators should reexamine the role of treaties while also critically examining the broader role schools have played within the systems of colonialism, assimilation, and oppression. This includes recognizing how educational institutions have historically contributed to the erasure of Indigenous languages, cultures, identities, and sovereignty through policies and practices designed to assimilate Indigenous peoples.

A key part of reform is providing educators with the tools to teach about treaties and Indigenous histories responsibly. This includes understanding important federal Indian education laws, such as the “Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; Public Laws 89-750 (1966) and 90-247 (1967); the Indian Education Act of 1972; and later reauthorizations under the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA); Hawkins-Stafford (1988);

Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) (1994); No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001); and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015)" (Pewewardy, 2022).

Beyond legal history, Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies need to be recognized and integrated into educational practice. These frameworks are rooted in kinship systems that serve as models for individual and communal behavior, emphasizing values such as harmony, responsibility, and generosity. Among the Ihanktonwan people, "the concepts of Oyate (nation), Tiwahe (immediate family), and Tiospaye (extended family) shape the social structures that guide children's learning and development" (Deloria & Deloria, 2006, p. xxiv) and seek to undo the systemic harm built into the ways schools are structured when thoughtfully applied within public schools, these relational systems support positive educational outcomes.

Meaningful advocacy also requires collaboration among Tribal Education Departments (TEDs), State Education Agencies (SEAs), and Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Educators and administrators must commit to learning about the tribes represented in their student populations (Brayboy, 2005; National Indian Education Association (NIEA), 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Each tribal nation offers unique epistemological, ontological, and cosmological perspectives, and data collection should be combined with relationship-building efforts to ensure culturally responsive support.

Curricula, such as South Dakota's Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings (South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations, Office of Indian Education, 2025), Washington State's "Since Time Immemorial" (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), n.d.), Montana's "Indian Education for All" (Montana Office of Public Instruction, n.d.), and Michigan's tribal education (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.), initiatives offer effective models. These place-based approaches help Indigenous students affirm their identities and give

all students a broader understanding of U.S. history. Community demographics, like those in Lawrence, Kansas, which is home to individuals from over 100 tribal nations, require educators to adopt flexible, listening-focused methods to navigate inter-tribal diversity. As Tuck and Yang (2012) argue in “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” (pp. 2-3), educators must critically evaluate their roles in supporting or dismantling colonial structures. Similarly, Brayboy and Castagno (2008) emphasize the significance of addressing colonization, racism, and power dynamics in educational settings, advocating for long-term professional development that positions educators as agents of equity and social change.

Lastly, respecting Indigenous kinship, harmony, sovereignty, and treaty rights is crucial for supporting Native students’ identity development and success. Educational systems must acknowledge the multiple layers of Indigenous knowledge and commit to learning in respectful ways. By addressing the needs of teachers, administrators, and school boards through ongoing, Indigenous-led collaboration, we can create an education system rooted in truth, respect, and shared responsibility.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study and shape the structure of the literature review:

1. In what ways do K–12 educators describe their previous classroom practices after participating in Kansas Advisory Council for Indian Education (KACIE) professional development?
2. In what ways do K–12 educators describe their intentions to alter future classroom practices after participating in KACIE professional development?

3. How do participant responses intersect with my lived experiences as an Indigenous person and professional educator?
4. What impacts does the KACIE professional development have on educator approaches, including reflection on practice, engagement with Indigenous communities, and Indigenization of curriculum?

The research questions guide this study and provide a framework for connecting the literature to the experiences of educators' experiences in KACIE professional development.

The first two research questions focus on educator practice. First, the study examines how K–12 educators describe their prior classroom practices following participation in KACIE professional development. Second, it explores how these educators articulate their intended changes to future classroom practices. Together, these questions examine educators' reports of their practice before and after a specific professional development experience, thereby situating this work within broader conversations about the impact of Indian education professional development on K–12 classroom practice. In addition, the third research question, how participant responses intersect with my lived experiences as an Indigenous person and professional educator, foregrounds my positionality as the researcher in this study. This aligns the study with Indigenous research traditions that recognize lived experience as a legitimate source of theory (Brayboy, 2005). Finally, the fourth research question examines the impact of KACIE professional development on educators' approaches, including their reflections on practice, engagement with Indigenous communities, and the Indigenization of curriculum. This question focuses on substantive changes in curriculum and community engagement, thereby connecting the study to scholarship on Indigenization and sovereignty explored throughout this review.

Justification

This research addresses the absence and misrepresentation of Tribal nations with historical ties to Kansas in the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) curriculum standards¹ (Sabzalian et al., 2021). Tribal nations are not specifically mentioned in Kansas social studies standards as contemporary sovereign governments. When Indigenous peoples are included, they are most often framed with a past-tense historical context, reinforcing the misconception that Native nations exist only in the past rather than as living political entities. This curricular deletion upholds settler-colonial narratives and contributes to social studies and civic misunderstandings about tribal nations and sovereignty.

This lack of contemporary representation has both educational and structural consequences. First, Native students in Kansas public schools rarely see their nations represented as modern governments with treaty rights, political authority, and ongoing community life. Second, non-Native students are denied accurate civic knowledge about the four federally recognized tribes located within Kansas. As Sabzalian et al. (2021) argue, “the absence of Indigenous nationhood in early civic education reproduces misconceptions that students must later unlearn later. Indigenous nationhood is not ‘mature’ knowledge; rather, it is vital civic knowledge for even young learners” (p. 338). When Indigenous sovereignty is omitted from standards, the state effectively normalizes a limited and incomplete version of American democracy.

Although the KSDE standards include references to tribal nations in the appendices, these references do not require instructional implementation. Consequently, the inclusion of Indigenous content often depends on individual educators' discretion, knowledge, or willingness.

¹ See: <https://www.ksde.gov/student-success/standards>

While some teachers may incorporate tribal perspectives, there is no systemic requirement or accountability mechanism ensuring that Indigenous nationhood and contemporary tribal governance are taught consistently across districts. In response, this research sought to address structural gaps in Kansas education policy and practice by examining how Kansas teachers include tribal nations in their lesson plans. This research aimed to identify pathways for embedding Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty into the curriculum in ways that are both tribally specific and supported. This is not simply a matter of adding content; it is a matter of civic accuracy and educational equity.

The praxis component of this research focused on developing actionable strategies for integrating contemporary tribal representation into Kansas classrooms. Specifically, this research shows collaboration with the four federally recognized tribes in Kansas, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), the Kansas Advisory Council for Indian Education (KACIE), and key personnel to examine how curriculum guidance, professional development, and state-level policy adjustments can move beyond symbolic inclusion toward structural integration. This includes identifying mechanisms for embedding tribally specific language into standards, strengthening educator preparation, and increasing accountability for implementation.

Ultimately, the rationale for this research is grounded in the urgent need to correct the systemic erasure of Indigenous nationhood in Kansas education. Without structural reform, Indigenous students remain marginalized, and students graduate without foundational civic, historical, and contemporary knowledge about the sovereign tribal nations within the state. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing educational equity, strengthening tribal–state relationships, and supporting Indigenous sovereignty through education.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008) and the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (Pewewardy et al., 2022) as its theoretical framework, as addressing the systemic erasure of Indigenous nationhood in Kansas education requires both an ethical foundation and a structural pathway for change. Indigenous Storywork provides the epistemological grounding, while TIPM offers the pedagogical and practical mechanism for curriculum transformation.

Indigenous Storywork is grounded in the Four Rs: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, which establish relational accountability in both research and educational practice (Archibald, 2008, p. 1). Respect ensures that Indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and community narratives are honored as legitimate forms of theory and data. Furthermore, respect requires teachers and educators to move beyond ‘heroes and holidays’ approaches by teaching about Indigenous peoples as contemporary nations with lived realities, enduring sovereignty, and ongoing contributions to society. Relevance requires that the curriculum move beyond pre-1900 representations and reflect the contemporary sovereignty and lived realities of tribal nations. In Kansas, this means integrating lived knowledge about the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska, and Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska as contemporary sovereign Nations with active governments, cultures, and community knowledge systems. At the same time, relevance also requires acknowledging that many other Tribal Nations are represented throughout Kansas beyond the four federally recognized tribes located within the state. Reciprocity demands that research and curricular reform benefit Indigenous communities rather than extract knowledge for institutional gain. In Kansas, this is demonstrated through ongoing collaborations with Tribal Nations, Title

VI programs, KACIE, and KACIE PD's to ensure Indigenous perspectives are represented in meaningful and respectful ways. Responsibility obligates educators and researchers to act ethically with the stories and teachings entrusted to them. Together, these principles ensure that this study does not replicate settler-colonial research practices but instead aligns with Indigenous epistemologies that view knowledge as relational and grounded in land, community, and lived experience (Wilson, 2008, p. 80).

While Indigenous Storywork provides the ethical and relational foundation, it does not by itself outline how teachers move from awareness to systemic transformation. For that reason, the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM) is also utilized.

TIPM identifies four dimensions of curriculum engagement: Contributions, Additive, Transformational, and Cultural and Social Justice Action. The Contributions and Additive dimensions allow for the inclusion of Indigenous content within existing structures; however, they do not disrupt settler-colonial narratives that frame Indigenous peoples as historical or past tense. The Transformational dimension shifts the lens of curriculum itself, centering Indigenous sovereignty, knowledge systems, and contemporary presence. The Social Action dimension extends transformation beyond content, requiring educators to embody decolonizing pedagogies in daily practice.

(Pewewardy et al., 2022, pp. 4-6)

Using both frameworks together creates coherence between theory and praxis. Indigenous Storywork ensures that curriculum reform is relational, ethical, and grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing. TIPM ensures that reform is not suggestive but foundational. In the context of Kansas, where tribal nations are often marginalized within state standards and are primarily represented in historical contexts, these frameworks provide a necessary roadmap.

Storywork centers Indigenous voice and experience; TIPM guides educators through stages of transformation so that tribal nations are taught as living, sovereign governments rather than static historical subjects.

Ultimately, an integrated framework allows the research to move beyond critique toward actionable change. Indigenous Storywork anchors the work in relational accountability and community-defined knowledge, while the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model provides the pathway for teachers to transition from superficial inclusion to sovereignty-centered education. Together, they support the broader goal of dismantling settler-colonial structures in curriculum and advancing Indigenous self-determination in K–12 education systems.

Positionality Statement

This work is not only academic; it is deeply personal. My family's history is connected to the legacy of federal Indian boarding schools, specifically the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Two of my relatives, Emma and Henry St. Pierre, were taken to Carlisle under the direction of Richard Henry Pratt. Their father, Peter St. Pierre, remained home, navigating the uncertainty and fear that accompanied this era of forced assimilation. This is a part of my family's story that has not been widely spoken about. As I have come to understand, silence is not absence; it is protection, grief, and survival. Pratt's anti-Native approach reflects the broader assimilationist project that sought to erase Indigenous identity, language, and ways of being. As noted by Adams (2020) in *Education for Extinction*, Pratt was authorized to recruit 125 students for the school and actively sought children from the Dakotas by September 1879. During Carlisle's early operation, students were placed with white farm families as part of an 'outing system,' intended to further enforce assimilation.

It is within this context that I locate my relatives' experiences. Based on family accounts and historical interpretation, I believe Emma St. Pierre became ill while participating in this 'outing system'. Her father, Peter St. Pierre, had not heard from her for some time, and eventually received word, through a letter, that she was not well. Concerned for his daughter's safety, Peter contacted an Indian agent, who then reached out to the farmer where Emma had been placed. The farmer confirmed that Emma was indeed sick, and subsequently sent home to South Dakota. Fearing for his son's well-being, Peter then requested that Henry also be returned home. That request was granted.

While engaging with this history through Adams' work, I experienced a profound emotional response. Reading about the policies and practices of Carlisle was no longer abstract; it became personal. The realization that my own relatives were part of this system created a sense of heaviness and, at times, numbness. This emotional response has helped me better understand why these stories have not been widely shared within my family. Silence, in this context, can be understood as a response to trauma, a form of protection, and a reflection of the ongoing impacts of boarding school experiences.

At the same time, this history provides important insight into how assimilation policies disrupted not only individuals but also entire family systems, cultural transmission, and connections to language and identity. The absence of open dialogue about these experiences is not a lack of history, but rather evidence of the strong and lasting effects of colonial education systems. This understanding shapes my commitment to Indigenous education and informs the purpose of this study: to support educators in moving beyond superficial inclusion toward transformational and relational practices that honor Indigenous knowledge, sovereignty, and survivance.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature that frames the present study, which examines how K–12 educators describe their practice after participating in the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE) professional development. The organizing framework is the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM) by Pewewardy et al. (2022). TIPM is a developmental and relational model for cultivating critical consciousness among educators working in and alongside Indigenous communities. Pewewardy et al. (2022) “explicitly identified four bodies of theory as constitutive of TIPM: decolonization theory, Indigenous postcolonial theory, tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit), and the insurgent research framework” (p. 41). This chapter centers TIPM as the organizing construct and treats the four foundational frameworks as the intellectual tributaries that feed it. The chapter is organized so that each theoretical strand maps onto the research questions that guide this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study and shaped the structure of the literature review:

1. In what ways do K–12 educators describe their previous classroom practices after participating in Kansas Advisory Council on Indigenous Education (KACIE) professional development?
2. In what ways do K–12 educators describe their intentions to alter future classroom practices after participating in KACIE professional development?
3. How do participant responses intersect with my lived experiences as an Indigenous person and professional educator?

4. What impacts does the KACIE professional development have on educator approaches, including reflection on practice, engagement with Indigenous communities, and Indigenization of curriculum?

These questions ask, in TIPM terms, “how educators move from contributions-level practice toward the transformation and cultural and social justice action dimensions” (Pewewardy et al., 2022, pp. 4–5). The discussion of TIPM that follows anchors this chapter, after which the four foundational frameworks are examined in turn for the contributions each makes to answering the research questions.

The Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM)

The Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model emerged from Dr. Cornel Pewewardy's decades of work in Indigenous teacher education and was formally articulated with Dr. Anna Lees and Hyuny Clark-Shim in *Wicazo Sa Review* (Pewewardy et al., 2018). The model was further elaborated in *Unsettling Settler-Colonial Education*, an edited volume that applied TIPM across “birth-to-grade-twelve education, teacher education, higher education, and educational leadership” (Pewewardy et al., 2022, pp. 8-9). Pewewardy developed this model in response to the persistence, even within seemingly multicultural and culturally responsive frameworks, of dysconscious racism, deficit thinking, and the recolonization of Indigenous students by well-intentioned pedagogy. In response to these ongoing challenges, the TIPM was created as a developmental ladder by which educators might honestly assess their current consciousness and aspire toward transformational practice (Pewewardy et al., 2022).

Through a metaphor of wave jumping, educators working to decolonize their practice can gain forward momentum while recognizing the constant movement and unpredictability of the work (Pewewardy et al., 2022). In this sense, as water is always in motion, so too are efforts

toward decolonization. Rather than representing a fixed or linear progression, this metaphor emphasizes that growth occurs through cycles of learning, reflection, and action. At times, educators may move forward with clarity and purpose; at other times, they may encounter resistance or return to earlier understandings as they navigate shifting social, cultural, and institutional contexts. In this way, decolonizing practice is best understood as fluid and relational, requiring ongoing responsiveness rather than a singular endpoint.

Building on this understanding, the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model provides a structure for conceptualizing this movement through four interconnected dimensions: contributions, additive, transformation, and cultural and social justice action. Initially, the contributions dimension reflects surface-level inclusion, often limited to highlighting Indigenous figures or events. Next, the additive dimension introduces Indigenous perspectives into existing curriculum without fundamentally altering its structure. As educators deepen their practice, the transformation dimension involves rethinking curriculum and pedagogy through Indigenous perspectives, shifting how knowledge is organized and taught. Ultimately, the cultural and social justice action dimension calls educators to embody this learning in daily practice by advocating for Indigenous sovereignty, building relationships with communities, and taking action to disrupt inequitable systems. Taken together, these dimensions reinforce that movement through TIPM is not strictly linear but rather mirrors the cyclical, evolving nature of the wave-jumping metaphor.

Pewewardy et al. (2018) clarified that “It is crucial to note that this mode is not designed to ‘diagnose’ an individual’s ‘condition’ but rather to provide terminologies that support educators” (pp. 39). The model offers a shared vocabulary that educators, schools, and systems can use to name the conditions of their practice and chart a direction of growth. For example, a

school district may operate at the contributions stage even while certain teachers within it have moved toward transformation.

Why TIPM?

The Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model can be thoughtfully understood alongside the broader family of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Gay, 2010; Paris, 2012) while also offering important extensions to this body of work. First, TIPM centers colonization as its primary analytic lens, recognizing culture as something lived within and in response to ongoing colonial structures. Second, TIPM builds on the work of Tuck and Yang (2012) by emphasizing the importance of moving beyond symbolic or attitudinal shifts toward meaningful, significant commitments that honor and uphold indigenous sovereignty. Finally, TIPM brings a strong focus on institutional responsibility, highlighting that transformational change is not solely the work of individual educators but also requires schools and educational systems to engage in sustained, structural transformation (Pewewardy et al., 2022).

Foundational Frameworks of TIPM

TIPM's significance for the present study rests on its synthesis of four foundational traditions, of which the first two - decolonization theory and Indigenous postcolonial theory - supply the model's ontological and epistemological grounding. Decolonization theory, anchored by Smith's (1999, 2021) decolonizing methodologies, begins from the recognition that colonialism is an ongoing structure rather than a discrete historical episode (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 1) sharpened this tradition by insisting that decolonization is not a metaphor for diversity, equity, and inclusion but a material project tied to the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Indigenous postcolonial theory, articulated by Battiste (2000, 2013) and extended by Grande's (2015) Red pedagogy, centers Indigenous knowledge on its own terms

and refuses the whitestream universalism of mainstream critical theory. Together, these two traditions establish why TIPM, rather than a generic culturally responsive framework, is indispensable for this study. The movement from how educators describe their previous classroom practices (RQ1) toward their stated intentions for future practice (RQ2) cannot be measured by attitudinal change alone. It requires educators to recognize colonization as ongoing and to commit materially through curriculum, relationships, and action to Indigenous sovereignty.

The second pair of foundational traditions, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005) and the insurgent research framework (Gaudry, 2011), delivers with its analytic and methodological scaffolding, and both speak directly to the remaining research questions. Brayboy's (2005, pp. 429–430) TribalCrit begins from the foundational tenet that colonization is endemic to society and holds together the racialized and political-legal status of Indigenous peoples as citizens of sovereign nations. Crucially for RQ3, TribalCrit legitimizes story as theory (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430), affirming that the researcher's lived experiences as an Indigenous person and professional educator constitute a legitimate interpretive lens for participant accounts rather than a bias to be bracketed. Gaudry's (2011, pp. 113–117) insurgent research framework, situated within the broader Indigenous research methodology literature (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), provides TIPM with its orientation toward Indigenous worldviews, community accountability, and action: research and pedagogy alike must be grounded in, responsible to, and useful for Indigenous communities. These principles directly inform RQ4, which asks how KACIE professional development shapes educator approaches, including reflection on practice, engagement with Indigenous communities, and Indigenization of curriculum.

Applications of TIPM in Educational Practice

Pewewardy et al. (2022) organized “Unsettling Settler-Colonial Education” around four applied contexts: “birth-to-grade-twelve and community education, teacher education, higher education, and educational leadership” (pp. 8-9). In K–12 settings particularly relevant to the present study, educators in the contribution dimension often rely on Native American Heritage Month displays or Thanksgiving units that present Indigenous peoples as historical artifacts. The additive dimension interrogates the settler-colonial narratives in standard curricula, while the transformational dimension redesigns curriculum around Indigenous epistemologies and place-based pedagogies developed in partnership with local tribal nations (Bang & Marin, 2015; Pewewardy et al., 2022). The cultural and social justice dimension is evident when teachers change the educational experience for Indigenous students.

Relational Meaning. TIPM weaves these four traditions into a single developmental praxis. Decolonization theory recognizes that colonization is ongoing and that the project is material, rather than metaphorical (Smith, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Indigenous postcolonial theory provides the epistemological resources to center Indigenous knowledge on its own terms and to resist the whitestream tendencies of critical theory (Battiste, 2013; Grande, 2015). TribalCrit provides the analysis to hold together the political and racial dimensions of Indigenous experiences and the recognition that colonization is endemic to society (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 429–430). The insurgent research framework provides the methodological orientation toward Indigenous worldviews, community accountability, and action (Gaudry, 2011). Together, these frameworks make possible the developmental and relational praxis that Pewewardy et al. (2022) named TIPM.

The present study uses TIPM as its organizing framework to examine how K–12 educators describe their past and intended practices after participating in the KACIE professional development, and how those accounts intersect with the researcher's lived experiences as an Indigenous educator. By foregrounding TIPM, the study joins a small but growing empirical literature that seeks to move beyond the additive inclusion of Indigenous content toward the transformation and cultural and social justice action stages described by Pewewardy et al. (2018, 2022). The sections that follow operationalize TIPM's four stages as both analytic and evaluative lenses for interpreting the data in this study.

Indian Education: History, Policy, and Professional Development

This section provides a brief overview of the literature on Indian education in the United States, with particular attention to the preparation and professional development of K–12 educators who serve Indigenous students and teach about Indigenous peoples. Specifically, it complements the preceding theoretical review of the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM) by situating the study of educators' stories, following participation in the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE) professional development, within the broader history of federal Indian education policy and contemporary scholarship on Indigenization, sovereignty, and teacher learning. Campbell-Daniels (2021) found that educators viewed Indigenous-focused professional development as an opportunity to deepen their understanding of Indigenous education. As one participant explained, "I think professional development helps teachers to go deeper, beyond surfacelevel" (p. 91). This finding suggests that sustained professional development encourages educators to move beyond superficial understandings toward more meaningful engagements with Indigenous communities and educational practices. Educators need guidance in that Indian education cannot be understood as a

subspecialty of multicultural or equity-oriented education; rather, it is a distinct field shaped by treaty relationships, federal trust obligations, and the ongoing political status of Tribal Nations (Brayboy, 2005; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

To organize this discussion, the literature review is structured into three interrelated strands: a historical strand tracing Indian education from the federal boarding school Era through the self-determination Era (Adams, 2020; Szasz, 1999); a policy strand examining the legislative architecture of contemporary Indian education; and a pedagogical and professional strand that brings together scholarship on culturally responsive and sovereignty-based schooling, the Indigenization of curriculum, and the professional development demands placed on educators serving Indigenous students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Sabzalian, 2019).

Brief History Overview: Indian Education

The history of Indian education in the United States reflects a broader federal trajectory from assimilation toward self-determination; however, this shift remains incomplete and contested. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, federal boarding school policies sought to erase Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities, positioning education as a tool of assimilation rather than empowerment (Adams, 2020). Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879 under the leadership of Captain Richard Henry Pratt, became the standard for off-reservation boarding schools, where practices such as cutting students' hair, prohibiting Indigenous languages, imposing English names, and enforcing military-style discipline were standard (Adams, 2020, p. 131). Importantly, these practices were not incidental but significant instruments of federal policy, and their effects, including intergenerational trauma, language loss, and disrupted kinship systems, go on to shape Indigenous education today (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

In 1928, the *Meriam Report* exposed the harmful conditions of boarding schools and the broader failures of federal Indian policy, documenting systemic neglect and the damaging effects of assimilationist practices (Meriam, 1928). Decades later, the *Kennedy Report* reinforced these findings, naming the federal approach to Indian education a “national tragedy” and calling for meaningful reform (U.S. Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969). In response to these critiques, the Indian Education Act, enacted as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, introduced mechanisms for parental and community involvement through Title VI programs, thereby signaling a shift toward local voice and more culturally relevant education (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Building on this momentum, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act marked a significant turning point by affirming Tribal Nations’ rights to control their own educational systems and priorities (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Although early policy efforts, such as the Johnson-O’Malley Act, also provided supplemental funding for Native students in public schools, control largely remained within federal and state systems, limiting Tribal Nations’ authority over educational experiences (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Although legislative efforts represented movement toward sovereignty and self-determination, the enduring legacy of assimilationist policies continued to shape contemporary education systems, including the ongoing marginalization and misrepresentation of Indigenous nationhood within state standards such as those in Kansas.

The Contemporary Policy Landscape

The federal legal architecture shaping contemporary Indian education is grounded in a series of key statutes. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 established the federal framework for funding K–12 education and remains the primary vehicle through which

the Indian Education Act of 1972 currently operates². Subsequently, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 enabled Tribal Nations to assume control of schools previously operated by the federal government, thereby creating space for tribally controlled education systems (Reyhner & Eder, 2004, pp. 291–314). In later years, policies, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, introduced standardized accountability systems that many tribal educators viewed as misaligned with culturally grounded approaches to education (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). More recently, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 retained Title VI funding while strengthening requirements for tribal consultation. Additionally, Executive Order 13592 (2011) reaffirmed federal commitments to American Indian and Alaska Native education, identifying teacher preparation and professional development as national priorities. Collectively, these policies establish the legal and institutional context within which local initiatives such as KACIE operate.

Curriculum, Sovereignty, and Indigenization

The literature on Indigenous curriculum has evolved across several generations of scholarship. Early work, such as Cajete's (1994) articulation of an Indigenous philosophy of education grounded in land, community, and relationality, laid the foundation for later critiques of Western knowledge systems (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Building on this foundation, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argued that while culturally responsive education gained traction, it was often reduced to superficial cultural inclusion rather than understood as a project of sovereignty and self-determination. Subsequently, scholarship made the dimension of sovereignty more explicit. Brayboy and Castagno (2009) argued that culturally responsive schooling should be understood as an effort toward Native nation building. Likewise, Sabzalian

² See Title VI of ESEA as amended.

(2019), through classroom-based research, demonstrated that meaningful Indigenization requires sustained engagement with tribal sovereignty, survivance, and the realities of contemporary Indigenous life, rather than isolated content additions. Taken together, this body of literature reinforces a central argument of this study: curriculum change, in and of itself, is insufficient. Rather, without sovereignty-grounded teacher learning, educators are unlikely to move beyond the contributions or additive stages described in the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (Pewewardy et al., 2018).

Professional Development for Educators

Nearly nine out of 10 American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students attend U.S. public schools (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2020; McCarty & Lee, 2014); however, “These public and often off-reservation school are much less likely to have Native American teachers” (McCarty & Lee, 2024, pp. 104), as the vast majority of public school teachers are not Native. Teacher preparation programs play a critical role in preparing future educators; however, they often receive little preparation in Indigenous education. Nganga and Kambutu (2024) observed that “the professional development of teacher educators has been largely overlooked” (p. 3). This observation reinforces the need for sustained professional development that equips educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach Indigenous history and Tribal sovereignty. This demographic reality places professional development (PD) at the heart of any serious project to improve Indigenous students’ schooling experiences. However, the PD K–12 educators typically receive is designed for basic teacher training and rarely attends to tribal sovereignty, tribally specific knowledge, or the long history of assimilationist schooling that continues to shape Indigenous children’s encounters with U.S. public education (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Shear et al., 2015). This section argues that PD is not peripheral but central to equitable schooling for

Indigenous students and reviews the empirical and conceptual literature that distinguishes PD that reproduces colonial harm from PD that supports teacher growth, student learning, and community self-determination.

The importance of PD derives first from who teaches Indigenous students. The National Council for the Social Studies (2018) notes that "the diversity of American teachers fails to reflect the students they serve" (p. 169). PD is therefore the primary vehicle through which non-Native teachers learn what preservice preparation did not teach them about Indigenous histories, governance, and pedagogies. Without PD that names this history, teachers default to curricula that extend it. Shear et al. (2015) found that "86.66% of the state-level U.S. and state history standards dictate the teaching of Indigenous Peoples in the context of pre-1900 U.S. history" (p. 81), and "teachers, therefore, year after year, reify the hegemonic nature of U.S. history through denial of these silences" (p. 76).

Professional development (PD) for K–12 educators of Indigenous students has been the subject of a smaller, but steadily growing, body of empirical and conceptual work. For example, Brayboy and Castagno (2009) identified the inadequacy of one-off cultural-awareness sessions, which often reinforce stereotypes and position Indigenous cultures as artifacts of the past rather than living political communities. Building on this foundation, Lees (2016) found that sustained relational engagement with Indigenous community members and elders, rather than reading assignments or one-time lectures, was the mechanism that supported teachers' developmental movement.

Furthermore, Conrad and Hardison-Stevens (2024) conceptualize teacher learning as a process that "Teachers' learning parallels Native sovereignty and Cedar tree growth" (p. 225). Drawing on the teachings of Grandmother Cedar, the authors argue that meaningful professional

learning is continuous, relational, and cumulative rather than linear or completed through a single professional development experience. Like the growth rings of a cedar tree, educators develop deeper understanding over time as they engage in reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities, reflect on their own assumptions, and expand their understanding of Tribal sovereignty. This metaphor reframes teacher learning as a lifelong process of growth that is strengthened through sustained engagement with Indigenous knowledge holders, place-based learning, and ongoing reflection.

Similarly, Pewewardy (2022) argued that PD rooted only in content inclusion rarely moves teachers past the additive stage of TIPM; instead, what appears to matter is a PD design that engages educators with tribal sovereignty, invites participation from tribal nations and knowledge keepers, and provides structured opportunities for educators to reflect on their positionality (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2020).

Lastly, four features recur in the literature on PD that support teacher development. First, PD must be sustained rather than sporadic. In Lees's (2016) study, community partners recalled a summer course in which "all of the teachers were required to...audit...just to get a better understanding" (p. 372), and Castagno (2021) described the Diné Institute for Navajo Nation Educators as a multi-year collaborative in which teachers work as intellectual partners rather than "consumers of scripted curriculum" (p. 325). Second, PD must be community-led. Lees (2016) argues that "university administrators and faculty must embrace decolonization, redefine who they consider experts in preparing teachers for urban Indigenous communities" (p. 374), and NCSS (2018) calls for educators to move "beyond inviting Indigenous Peoples as guest speakers, to including Indigenous Peoples as decision-makers" (p. 172). Third, PD must be sovereignty-centered. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argue that "all teachers must learn and know about the

unique government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the federal government" (p. 973), and McCarty and Lee (2014) insist that "tribal sovereignty must include education sovereignty" (p. 102). Fourth, PD must include structured reflection on positionality. Anthony-Stevens et al. (2020) and Castagno (2021) model this through autoethnographic journals, mentor-teacher protocols, and reflective writing embedded throughout their programs. For non-Native teachers, positionality work is the relational practice through which they become trustworthy collaborators with Indigenous students, families, and communities.

At the same time, several studies have documented the challenges non-Native educators face when undertaking this work. According to Sabzalian (2019), non-Native teachers bring to Indigenous content-arranged curricular alignments that include orientations of erasure, heroic masculinity, and political neutrality; importantly, these orientations persist even among well-meaning teachers and tend to reassert themselves absent sustained critical reflection. In a related vein, Castagno (2014) analyzed what was called the politics of niceness in predominantly white educational spaces, wherein a culture of comfort substitutes for substantive engagement with race, sovereignty, and colonial history.

Need for Professional Development for Kansas Educators. Based on these well-documented disparities and curricular gaps, there is an urgent need for professional development in Kansas, focused on the history, politics, and culture of Tribal nations. Bonilla (2025) emphasizes the importance of intentional professionalism. Bonilla writes that

It would be helpful to have a pilot study of public-school educators as they go through a crash course of Indian Education 101 professional development programming while being provided resources and mentorship to utilize existing lesson plans that accurately portray Indigenous peoples. (p. 141)

Bonilla further argues that “Educators would benefit from purposeful professional development and dedicated time to become familiar with and integrate these new state sanctioned resources into their current pedagogy” (p. 145). These statements reinforce the reality that educators cannot simply be handed resources without also being provided the time, support, and relational learning necessary to meaningfully implement Indigenous-centered curriculum into their classrooms.

The Kansas-Nebraska Indian Education Study and Community Building Project (Red Corn et al., 2021) surfaces a set of conditions that, taken together, make a compelling case for Indigenous-led professional development (PD) in public schools serving American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. The report documents that “63% of AI/AN students in Kansas” (Red Corn et al., 2021, p. 4) are rendered invisible within the multiracial demographic category. The report also indicates that “146 Kansas districts qualify” (Red Corn et al., 2021, p. 4) for Title VI Indian Education formula funding but do not pursue it, and that state curricular infrastructures remain largely unresponsive to Native peoples, communities, and sovereignties. These are not isolated technical problems. They are interlocking systemic failures that demand educator learning grounded in Indigenous knowledge, relationships, and leadership.

The report's findings mirror the experience of practitioners working as Title VI and Johnson O'Malley (JOM) directors in the region. Title VI coordinators are frequently positioned as the de facto instructors of their colleagues, expected to “teach the teachers” (Red Corn et al., 2021, p. 31). about Native students, families, cultures, and the very existence of federal Indian education programming. This labor is largely uncompensated, often falls outside formal job descriptions, and is rarely recognized as the specialized expertise it is. The report further notes that many teachers and administrators are unaware of Title VI’s existence; therefore, they are

unaware that it is a funding stream to support AI/AN students (Red Corn et al., 2021). This knowledge gap results in the loss of nearly \$1.5 million in federal funds in Kansas alone.

Indigenous-led PD addresses this gap at its root by ensuring that educators learn about Indian education from those who hold both the lived knowledge and the practitioner expertise to convey it accurately.

The case for Indigenous leadership in PD is further substantiated by data from the National Indian Education Study (Rampey et al., 2019). Approximately 22% of fourth-grade teachers serving AI/AN students reported that college courses and workshops had not prepared them "at all" (Red Corn et al., 2021, p. 20) to work with AI/AN students, while 33% reported being prepared to a "small extent" (Red Corn et al., 2021, p. 20). Nearly half of these teachers rated the AI/AN-specific materials in their school libraries as unsatisfactory, and almost none identified as AI/AN themselves. PD that is designed and facilitated by non-Native consultants, however well-intentioned, risks reproducing the very Eurocentric framings the report identifies as problematic, including the pre-1900 framing of Native peoples documented in Kansas social studies standards (Red Corn et al., 2021; Sabzalian et al., 2021; Shear et al., 2015).

Kansas has begun to respond to these conditions. The formation of the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education Working Group (KACIE-WG) in 2022 created a formal structure for ongoing dialogue between Native Nations, the Kansas State Department of Education, the Kansas State Board of Education, and the Kansas Board of Regents (Red Corn et al., 2021). In 2022, the State Board affirmed a KACIE-WG statement urging schools to "discontinue American Indian mascots and branding" (Red Corn et al., 2021, p. 43), and the KACIE-WG Essential Understandings Task Force was established in 2023 to work directly with Native Nations on curricular reform and resource development. These developments, alongside

the emergence of Indigenous studies elective courses at Manhattan High School, Horton High School, and Royal Valley High School (Red Corn et al., 2021), signal a shift toward Native-led structures rather than Native-consulted ones.

Indigenous-led PD is therefore not a symbolic gesture but a structural necessity. It corrects the visibility problems embedded in data systems, addresses the preparation gaps documented in NIES findings, supports districts in accessing unused Title VI resources, and aligns educator practice with the curricular reforms now emerging through KACIE-WG. Without it, the cycle of erasure described in the report will continue regardless of policy intent.

Similarly, Mackey et al. (2022) highlighted why sustained professional development opportunities are necessary within Indian Education by explaining, “We then carved out a pathway to generate a professional development opportunity that was conducted on a regular interval for shorter periods of time for non-native educators to draw meaningful connections between the school and Indigenous students” (p. 146). This approach recognizes that culturally responsive and Indigenous-centered teaching practices are not developed through one-time workshops, but rather through ongoing engagement, reflection, and relationship-building. Mackey et al. (2022) further argued that “The structure and design of the cohort provides space to co-create meaningful professional development between Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders and participants that prioritizes Indigenous voices, leading to tangible changes with the school district” (p. 153). Importantly, Mackey et al. emphasize the significance of Indigenous-led collaboration in professional development spaces, where Indigenous communities and educators are not positioned as supplemental voices, but as central knowledge holders guiding educational transformation.

This type of PD aligns well with the recommendations provided by Sabzalian (2019), who wrote that “Districts and schools should support ongoing professional development for teachers regarding Indigenous Education” (p. 221). Sabzalian also asserts that “Districts should develop formal relationships with nearby Native nations” (p. 221). These recommendations are particularly relevant in Kansas because meaningful Indigenous Education requires more than curriculum adoption; rather, it requires reciprocal relationships with tribal nations and communities that continue to exist as sovereign governments and living peoples.

The importance of sustained and long-term professional development is also reflected in the work of Castagno et al. (2022), who noted, “Considering that the teachers participated in an 8-month, relatively intensive professional development experience focused on cultural responsiveness, this is a positive finding” (p. 142). This suggests that meaningful shifts in educator understanding and practice require time, continuity, and sustained engagement rather than isolated professional development sessions. Likewise, Castagno (2021) emphasized the importance of partnership and Indigenous leadership in professional development, stating, “The timing was fortuitous when two Diné teacher leaders came to my university to talk about their vision for a partnership between the Navajo Nation and the university that would provide long-term, culturally responsive professional development to teachers in Indigenous-serving schools” (p. 330). This statement reinforces the importance of collaborative relationships among universities, tribal nations, and school systems in creating professional development that is grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems and community priorities.

The work of the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE) directly addresses these concerns by creating Indigenous-led professional development opportunities centered on tribal sovereignty, Indigenous histories, culturally responsive pedagogy, and

accurate representation of Native peoples in Kansas schools. Through partnerships with tribal nations, educators, the Kansas State Department of Education, and institutions of higher education, KACIE has supported educators in moving beyond tokenized inclusion toward transformational practices that recognize Indigenous peoples as contemporary nations and communities. Effective Indigenous education requires educators to move beyond the classroom and develop meaningful relationships with Tribal Nations and communities. As Nganga and Kambutu (2024) stated, “ Teachers must continually seek to understand the communities in which they are located” (p. 14). This aligns with the KACIE professional development model, which emphasized collaboration with Tribal Nations and communities through reciprocal relationships rather than relying solely on textbook knowledge.

Building meaningful relationships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities is an essential component of effective Indigenous professional development. Anthony-Stevens et al. (2025) found that “participation in cultural activities facilitates connections and credibility with community” (p. 560). The authors explain that as educators participated in Tribal cultural activities and community events, they developed stronger relationships with students, families, and Tribal communities, increasing both their credibility and trust within those communities. These findings demonstrate that professional development extends beyond acquiring instructional knowledge to fostering reciprocal relationships that support authentic collaboration and culturally responsive teaching.

In this way, KACIE’s professional development is not simply about adding Indigenous content into the curriculum; rather, it is about reshaping how educators understand relationships, community engagement, sovereignty, and culturally responsive teaching practices within Kansas education systems (Kansas Department of Education, n.d.-b).

From Literature to Praxis

While serving as a Title VI and Johnson O'Malley director in South Dakota, my responsibility was to help bridge the gap between our Native American community and the school district. I approached this work with intentionality, guided by a commitment to listen with my heart. This meant meeting the community where they were and spending time in both the 'old housing' and 'new housing', building relationships with families not through formal structures alone, but through presence, humility, and heart work.

One of the ways I supported this relational work was through a school van I called 'Goldie', my 'rez pony'. Goldie became more than transportation; she became a connector. I would pick up students and parents for meetings, including IEPs, school events, and everyday needs that often go unseen within traditional school systems. In many ways, Goldie functioned as a matriarch within our school community, helping bring people together and creating space for families to engage with educators in ways that felt accessible and respectful.

The events we created for our students and families are among the accomplishments I carry with pride. We invited Indigenous guest speakers throughout the year, hosted flute-making workshops, and organized storytelling sessions with elders that centered on Indigenous knowledge systems. We took students to the Brave Heart Lodge to engage in cultural learning, participate in traditional games, and attend the Lakota Nation Invitational, where students could experience the strength and vibrancy of Indigenous communities. We also held feather ceremonies to honor our graduates, gifting each student a star quilt as a symbol of accomplishment, identity, and belonging.

These experiences were not supplemental to education; more importantly, they were education. They reflect what it means to move beyond transactional approaches toward relational

and culturally grounded practice. In many ways, this work aligns with the transformational and cultural action dimensions of the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model in which education is not simply about content delivery, but about sustaining relationships, honoring community knowledge, and creating spaces where Indigenous students and families feel seen, valued, and connected.

As I reflect on this work alongside the history presented in this chapter, including the experiences of my own relatives in boarding schools, I recognize both the disruption and the continuity within Indigenous education. Where systems once sought to separate families and suppress identity, this work represents an intentional effort to restore connection, rebuild trust, and center Indigenous ways of knowing and being. It is within this tension between historical harm and present-day resurgence that this study is situated.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As a citizen of the Ihanktonwan Oyate (Yankton Sioux Tribe), I was once reminded of what it truly means to be in relationship with my own Tribal Nation. At the time, I was preparing to ask an elder to collaborate with our school. When I approached our Kungsi (Grandmother), she responded, “Kenny, you’re acting like a wasicu.” I paused and asked what was meant. Kungsi explained, “When you ask an elder for help or knowledge, you offer a gift or something.” This served as an important correction and a return to relational ways of being. It reminded me that engagement with knowledge holders is not transactional, but grounded in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. This teaching aligns with what Ella Cara Deloria (2022) emphasized:

I can not tell you how essential it is for me to take beef or some food each time I go to an informant—the moment I don’t, I take myself right out of the Dakota side and class myself with outsiders. (p. xv)

That life lesson has become foundational to how I approach my work as an educator—working about, for, and with Indigenous people, places, and communities. It also shapes how I approach this research. As Deloria (2022) further reminds us, “to go at it like a white man, for me, an Indian, is to throw up an immediate barrier between myself and the people” (p. xv). This understanding guides my methodological commitments, particularly as I engage with non-Native educators. Rather than asking them to adopt Indigenous perspectives superficially, this work calls for bringing our full identities as Tribal citizens into the research process and creating space for relational, respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems.

Research Design

This chapter begins by describing the research paradigm, methodology, and design guiding this qualitative study of non-Native K–12 educators’ lived experiences with the Kansas

Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE) Essential Understanding Framework professional development. More specifically, the study is situated within an Indigenous research paradigm that centers relational accountability and experiential knowledge (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Within this paradigm, Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008) functioned as the methodology, recognizing storytelling as a valid, relational, and ethical form of inquiry.

Guided by this methodological stance, Storywork is enacted through the Four Rs: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), which not only structured the interview protocol but also guided interpretation and served as evaluative criteria. In this way, the research process remained accountable to both participants and the knowledge shared. As Archibald (2008) reminds us, “we have three ears to listen with, two on the sides of our head and one in our heart” (p. 76). Accordingly, this chapter outlines how I worked to listen with all four.

Building on this foundation, the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM) (Pewewardy et al., 2022) served as the analytic and transformative framework, offering a wave-jumping account of critical consciousness that traces educator praxis from Contributions and Additive approaches through Transformation and Culturally Responsive Indigenous/Social Action approaches. Through this lens, TIPM allowed the study to trace how non-Native teachers move from surface-level inclusion toward deeper shifts that center Indigenous knowledges, sovereignty, and contemporary realities. Finally, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005) was threaded throughout, naming colonization and sovereignty as central concerns that positivist approaches would otherwise silence.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was: *How do K–12 educators describe their lived experiences associated with teaching about Indigenous peoples and Nations as they work through KACIE professional development?* Additional research questions included: (1) In what ways do K–12 educators describe their previous classroom practices after participating in KACIE PD? (2) In what ways do educators describe their intentions to alter future classroom practices? (3) How do participant responses intersect with my lived experiences as an Indigenous person and professional educator? and (4) What impacts does KACIE PD have on educator approaches to reflection on practice, engagement with Indigenous communities, and Indigenization of curriculum? These questions were deliberately narrative and relational, inviting stories rather than behavioral reports and positioning participants as co-authors of meaning.

Research Paradigm and Methodology

An Indigenous research paradigm holds that knowledge is relational, that stories carry theory, and that the researcher is accountable to the people, places, and more-than-human relations implicated in the inquiry (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). From this standpoint, the method is not understood as a neutral instrument but rather as an ethical practice of relationship. Accordingly, Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork centers story, both personal narrative and cultural teaching, as a rigorous site of knowing, recognizing that meaning emerges in the dialogic space between storyteller and listener.

In extending this orientation, Cajete (1994, as cited in Archibald, 2008) emphasizes that researchers must “find a methodology that allows us to be our authentic selves”, that is, an extension of who we are as researchers and human beings so that we can ‘always think the

highest thought” (p. 12) and “conduct ourselves accordingly” (p. 12). Taken together, this commitment to relationality and authenticity forms the methodological spine of the study.

Participants

With these methodological commitments in place, participants included four non-Native K–12 educators in Kansas who had completed the KACIE Essential Understanding Framework professional development (see Appendix A). To ensure alignment with the study’s purpose, purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) was employed, with recruitment occurring through KACIE PD participants (see Appendix B). In doing so, participants represented a range of grade bands and content areas, with particular attention to social studies and civics, as well as diverse school contexts (urban, suburban, and rural). Importantly, a sample of this size is consistent with Indigenous Storywork’s depth-oriented privileging of sustained narrative engagement over breadth (Archibald et al., 2019).

Building from participant selection, data collection proceeded through relational and reciprocal methods. Each participant engaged in two semi-structured Storywork conversations lasting 60–90 minutes. During these conversations, open-ended narrative prompts (see Appendix C) organized under the Four Rs invited educators to describe their pre-KACIE teaching about Indigenous peoples and Nations, their experiences during KACIE, and their intentions for future practice. Subsequently, a second conversation provided space for participants to revisit and extend their initial stories while also engaging in a revised member-reflection process that supported shared interpretation. With participant consent (see Appendix B), all conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. Interview transcriptions will be retained for six years. In addition, a document review complemented these conversations, including an analysis of the Essential Understanding Framework.

Data Analysis

Analysis was Storywork-grounded and iterative, proceeding through four connected passes. First, following Archibald (2008) and Kovach (2009), the analysis attended to each story holistically and on its own terms, honoring the narrative arc shaped by the participant. Second, the Four Rs were applied as analytic themes, asking how each account expressed, strained against, or reshaped the commitments of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. Third, participant stories were situated within the dimensions of TIPM (Pewewardy et al., 2022), outlining developmental movement from Contributions and Additive practice toward Transformational and Cultural and Social Action praxis. Importantly, this pass explicitly attended to “wave-jumping,” allowing growth, regression, and simultaneity to remain visible in the analysis. Finally, the fourth critical pass brought participants’ narratives into intentional dialogue with my reflective methodological notes, directly engaging sub-question three and deepening the relational interpretation of their stories. To further honor shared authority, follow-up conversations were conducted so participants could respond to emerging interpretations and ensure their voices are represented with care and accuracy.

Protection of Human Subjects

In alignment with these relational and ethical commitments, the study was submitted to the University of Washington’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix D). Participants received informed consent forms (see Appendix E) explaining the study’s purpose, risks and benefits, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without repercussion. At the conclusion of the study, each participant received a thank-you letter (see Appendix F). To protect participant identity, pseudonyms are used unless participants request otherwise. Recordings and transcripts are stored on encrypted, password-protected devices with access limited to the researcher.

Consistent with an Indigenous research paradigm, rigor is framed in terms of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). Beyond these conventional criteria, relational validity was sustained through the Four Rs, ensuring the study remained accountable to participants, Indigenous communities in Kansas, and the stories entrusted to me. Additionally, TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) functioned as an ethical reminder that colonization and sovereignty must remain central, guarding against analytic moves that would flatten these realities into generic multicultural discourse. Together, these methodological and ethical commitments prepared the way for Chapter Four, which will present the findings that emerged from these stories, and Chapter Five, which will consider their implications for practice, policy, and the continued Indigenization of curriculum in Kansas schools.

Researchers Praxis

As I carry this methodology forward, I am reminded that the ways we engage in research must reflect the same values we hold in community respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. These are not abstract principles but lived practices that guide how we honor others.

I think about the time serving as an assistant coach for the girls' wrestling teams at Free State High School and Lawrence High School. During that time, I learned that one of our student-athletes was a three-time state champion, which is an incredible accomplishment. When going on to win the fourth state championship, we chose to honor such a wonderful athlete in a way that reflected who we are as Indigenous people. We gifted her a star quilt not only to recognize the achievement but also to show our respect and offer protection while she moves forward on the journey toward high school graduation and college. The star quilt was more than

a gift; it was a symbol of care, responsibility, and community, acknowledging that the success is carried with her and deeply held by those who provided support.

I am also reminded of a moment during our Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE) professional development work in partnership with the Kansas State Department of Education. At one of our in-person sessions, we recognized an ally who had supported this work in meaningful ways. In that space, a council member from the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation presented the ally with a star quilt in front of educators from across Kansas. This act was intentional. It was not only a gesture of appreciation but an opportunity for teachers to witness the significance of honoring relationships, understanding protocol, and recognizing the responsibilities that come with working alongside Indigenous communities.

CHAPTER FOUR: OHANWASTE (GENEROSITY)

This work is based on the understanding that we are responsible for taking care of one another and for sharing knowledge in a good way. In this sense, *Ohanwaste*, or generosity, calls us to act with compassion and to offer what we have for the well-being of others. Moreover, within the Oceti Sakowin worldview, one's character is measured by how well they care for their relatives and community. Therefore, the narratives shared in this chapter are not simply data; rather, they are expressions of generosity, offered in relationship and received with responsibility.

This qualitative study explored how Kansas educators comprehend and apply the Kansas Essential Understandings of Indigenous Nations and Peoples framework after the KACIE professional development series. This unique year-long program represents a collaborative partnership among the Library of Congress (LOC), the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), and the Kansas State Department of Education. Kansas educators learned to navigate the LOC's digital collections through a series of professional development opportunities. They accessed primary source materials while exploring best practices for integrating Native narratives, histories, and accurate representations of Indigenous Peoples and Nations into classroom instruction. In addition to expanding educators' content knowledge, the program fostered relationships with Indigenous educators and emphasized the creation of inclusive school communities where Indigenous students, families, and Tribal Nations are recognized as valued partners in education. Furthermore, McInnes (2017) found that developing relationships with Indigenous educators encourages a "positive and lasting interest in making target content and pedagogical additions within their future classrooms" (p. 149). With this idea in mind, we

strengthen the participants' confidence to implement Indigenous perspectives and sovereignty-centered content while fostering reciprocal relationships with Tribal Nations.

The program is grounded in teaching and learning about, for, and with Native communities. It was designed to help educators develop culturally informed, sovereignty-centered practices that honor Indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives. The program uses LOC resources and the Kansas Essential Understanding of Indigenous Nations and Peoples framework (Kansas Department of Education, n.d.-a).

To further strengthen relationship-building and community engagement, the program included two in-person professional development sessions, intentionally hosted at Haskell Indian Nations University, as well as two virtual learning sessions, enabling educators from across Kansas to participate in meaningful dialogue and collaborative learning. By centering Indigenous space, place, and relationality, the program enabled educators to engage with instructional resources and connect with the living histories, communities, and knowledge systems tied to Indigenous education. The study also used Pewewardy's (2022) Transformational Indigenous Practice Model and Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork, guided by the 4Rs of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

This chapter presents findings from interviews with four K–12 educators in Kansas; three were classroom social studies teachers, and one was an elementary instructional coach. Teacher voices served both as data and as a means of sharing knowledge. Each interview was treated as a story shared with me, an Indigenous educator/researcher from the Yankton Sioux Tribe. Data analysis aimed to honor these stories without breaking them into decontextualized codes.

Analysis of the four interviews revealed five related themes describing educators' movement from seeing Indigenous peoples only in historical terms to regarding them as

sovereign and contemporary. The themes are: (a) Shifting from removal to resilience; (b) Indigenous-led professional development boosting educator confidence; (c) Sovereignty as a key integration point; (d) Relational accountability to Indigenous students and communities; and (e) Systemic barriers to lasting change. Each theme is supported by evidence from the cases, showing shared and unique experiences. The chapter closes with a summary and a preview of the interpretation in Chapter Five.

Participant Profiles

To protect confidentiality, each participant received a pseudonym. Because the participants in this study are nonnative educators working within Indigenous education contexts, additional care was taken to protect their identities. The following brief profiles are intended to orient the reader to each participant before their voices appear in the thematic sections.

Parker

Parker taught for 19 years, including seventh-grade world geography and an eighth-grade pre-AVID course for first-generation college-bound students. A lifelong learner, they entered the KACIE PD interested in Indigenous education but realized their earlier teaching had placed Indigenous peoples in the past. After the workshops, she led resource-sharing sessions in their district.

Riley

Riley taught high school sociology, economics, and government for three years. Before the KACIE PD, they had a limited understanding of tribal sovereignty and taught Indigenous topics as past events, focusing on boarding schools. After PD, they began developing a K–12 sovereignty curriculum and embedding Indigenous content, while noting system-wide barriers.

Avery

Avery taught high school civics, U.S. history, current events, and Native American history for four years in a Kansas school near a Native Nation territory. Many of the students were Indigenous, and the school had a Title VI (Indian Education) program. KACIE expanded their content knowledge and shifted the pedagogy taught in the classroom. Next year, the school will add AP and world history classes.

River

River was an elementary instructional coach in Kansas, working with grades K–5 across all subjects. They had 18 years of experience in education, including service as a K–4 general education teacher and as a special education teacher. Before participating in the KACIE PD, their exposure to Indigenous histories and contemporary tribal nations was limited; the series sparked what was described as a ‘rabbit hole’ of continued learning. At the time of the interview, Erica was applying for the district’s social studies lead position with explicit plans to bring Indigenous voices into district-wide PD if selected.

Theme 1: From Removal to Resilience: A Pedagogical Shift Toward Contemporary**Indigeneity**

The strongest and most consistent finding was a shift away from viewing Indigenous peoples as only historical. Instead, all four educators saw Indigenous peoples as living, sovereign, and contemporary nations. Each participant said that changes in language and concepts started this shift. They described it as equally intellectual and ethical. Parker explained this most clearly when considering the framework’s language, sharing,

I like the language of ‘continued to thrive’ because I think it pushes me as an educator to make that shift to intentionally [move] from not just focusing on native people in the past

and being stuck in the past; it really stuck with me the change from going from removal to strength.

Parker described the change as moving ‘from removal to resilience,’ a unifying theme across all four interviews.

Avery described a similar transformation. Before the conducted professional development, teaching was viewed from the ‘Eurocentric viewpoint.’ The KACIE sessions admittedly had ‘completely turned Avery’s thinking upside down.’ The content was not new, but the framework provided them with a foundation and structure for their learning. Riley’s story followed a similar path. Before the PD, the boarding-school history was taught as a single, past-tense lesson. Afterward, Riley was able to connect the Carlisle Boarding School era and the Red Power movement to modern issues such as generational trauma, sovereignty, and Indigenous resilience.

River entered the KACIE PD with what was described as a ‘very limited’ awareness of Indigenous peoples, which had been known that Indigenous and Native populations were ‘still in existence,’ but had not understood the ‘unique circumstances that exist in today’s societies.’ River was struck during the sessions by data shared by Dr. Stephanie Fryberg (Fryberg et al., 2023), suggesting that approximately sixty percent of Americans believe Indigenous histories are a thing of the past. River named that statistic as one of the instances that crystallized a personal reorientation of the knowledge. They shared, “Our Indigenous populations are still here, still present. It’s not something of the past. It’s something of the very real present and the future. So, let’s treat it as such. Let’s respect it.” River also presented a post-PD experience in developmental terms that correspond with the unifying movement Parker had named. The shift, in River’s account, did not produce closure; it produced curiosity, sharing,

My eyes have been totally opened; it sparks more questions. It's not like it answers all your questions. It makes you have more questions, which I think is great because then you want to continue learning and continue knowing more.

As an instructional coach who reviewed curriculum across grades K–5, River also identified past-tense framing in the instructional materials the teachers were using. It was observed that older-grade units in their district were “centered in the past” and described the work after the PD as actively pushing back against that framing by “remembering that it's not in the past...it's still present.” Across all four cases, the change involved more than new content. It was a reorientation of how Indigenous peoples are taught: from then to now, and from absent to present.

Theme 2: Indigenous-Led Professional Development as a Driver of Educator Confidence

The second theme explored what conditions made these shifts possible. All four educators credited Indigenous-led professional development as the key reason for their growing confidence to teach Indigenous content. This PD was sustained over time and built on relationships rather than single sessions. Avery explained why hearing directly from Indigenous presenters made such a difference.

I think the content knowledge is one of the biggest barriers, and then just hearing from Indigenous people I think is a huge difference maker...white people can tell you over and over again that these things are important, and until you really look someone in the face and see how passionate they are and how much they care about it...that makes a huge difference.

Parker agreed and named a tribal councilman, who presented at one session, as a turning point in personally building confidence. The next day, the class of students visited a Kansas

Tribal Nation's website. Parker shared that students "kept telling me to click on" the government and newsletter pages. For Parker, seeing an elected tribal leader made contemporary sovereignty real. Avery also heard this councilman at two sessions and said their presence expanded on an understanding of "my place in doing something different."

River named the same councilman as the most valuable single moment of the entire PD series and located the value of his presence in the same temporal reorientation that organized Theme 1.

It was very, very, very valuable. And I think it went back to proving the point of...the relevance of today, like showing that Indigenous people are not in the past. It's in the present as well. So you can see a person, hear the stories, and hear the perspective from today and not center it in history.

River also identified a specific spark in the PD curriculum, the boarding-school content. The historical material was new and was described as a turning point that marked the beginning of a long-term trajectory of self-directed learning.

I did not know about that, and I wasn't aware of how that worked, but just learning about it, and even the very first session that we had, it was really eye-opening, and so now I've kind of, like, the rabbit hole has begun. And so I'm just really wanting to know more about how that looked.

However, River did not soften the affective weight of that learning. "It's really sad, of course, the deeper you explore it, just how culture was stripped away and punished away. And it was just heartbreaking. But it really did spark that whole thought process of learning more about indigenous culture."

The metaphor of a rabbit hole captures what the participants collectively described: a sustained PD experience that did not close their questions but multiplied them, prompting continued self-directed learning beyond the formal sessions. All four educators criticized the “one-off PD model” as ineffective and even harmful. Parker called for “PD times 100” with mentorship. Tiffany said, “If we just continue to have a one-off PD, it’s more harmful than useful.” Riley pointed out that one-time professional development is a barrier to lasting change. Erica framed the same critique from an instructional-coach perspective, calling for “continued PD...from an indigenous point of view with or led by indigenous folks,” arguing that without it, educators would not have the conceptual ground to revise the materials in front of them. These critiques show that the success of the KACIE PD relies on its ongoing, Indigenous-led approach.

Theme 3: Sovereignty as a Key Curricular Integration Point

Building on the previous themes, the third finding describes shifts in content and confidence that led to changes in instructional design. In all four cases, sovereignty became the main concept participants saw as both vital and underdeveloped in their teaching. When asked which of the framework’s nine subtopics, such as Collaborative Citizenship and Co-Existence, Indigenous Languages, Economics, Histories and Geographies, Sovereignty and Governance, Health, Wellness, and Foodways, Literature and Arts, Urban and Inter-Tribal Communities, and Indigenous STEM (Kansas Department of Education, 2024) guided steps, Parker chose sovereignty and governance. As Parker shared, “The most important next step is sovereignty and government, because I think that’s a shift I’ve made in my classroom for sure. The Kansas Essential Understanding brings a full picture.”

Avery articulated the same priority but framed it in terms of a vision for the field. Indigenous history, in a personal view, should not occupy isolated pockets of the U.S. history

curriculum but should run “in tandem” throughout it. Avery also noted that Indigenous voices should be present “not only about Indigenous history but...about American history,” the same way that scholarly attention to women’s history and Black history has been integrated across units.

Riley operationalized this orientation most concretely. According to the interview narrative, the development of a K–12 sovereignty curriculum progression began with a progression from early elementary through high school government. Riley then expanded any treatment of topics in adjacent disciplines, examining the General Allotment Act of 1887 in economics, integrating discussions of health disparities and food deserts in sociology, and identifying entry points for Indigenous knowledge in STEM-related discussions.

River’s entry into sovereignty came from a different angle, shaped by the role of elementary coach and by an interest in literature and the arts. Among the framework’s nine subtopics, they identified literature and the arts as a current priority, outlining plans to bring more books featuring Native characters into K–5 classrooms and to expose students to Indigenous voices in contemporary art. River shared,

I really like the kind of literature and arts. Just exploring how native literature and arts from the past, the representation that was in the past, and how it’s still being produced today. And how does it look today? And the native voices we can hear today in literature and art, I would like to incorporate them more into lessons by getting more books with Native characters and exposing students to native voices. So then they won’t be like that 60 [percent] number that we heard.

River’s portfolio for the KACIE PD operationalized sovereignty in a second way that the other three participants did not. Rather than redesigning a single classroom’s curriculum, River

designed PD materials to introduce elementary colleagues to the framework and to the concepts of sovereignty and governance, reasoning that educators cannot integrate what they have not been given language for.

Some of my portfolio projects were PD for Educators, just introducing them to the framework. As well as to what sovereignty...governance...just bringing them to terms of what those terms mean so that they can have an exposure and an understanding of it. And then springboarding into, okay, so what do we have? Is it serving our needs? Is it accurate? Is it an accurate portrayal? So then take it into the next step. So then what can we do? What should we change? How should we adjust as needed

Across the four cases, the framework's nine subtopics were not treated as a checklist but as scaffolding for an integrated, sovereignty-centered curriculum that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries and encouraged educators to situate Indigenous knowledge, histories, and contemporary realities across all areas of teaching and learning.

Theme 4: Relational Accountability Centering Indigenous Students, Families, and Communities

The fourth theme captured a relational dimension that corresponded directly with the 4Rs of Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork. Each participant offered at least one extended account of a relationship, or the absence of one, that the KACIE framework had either prompted or sharpened. Parker recounted the experience of a student whose grandmother was a member of the East Coast Tribe. Afterward, Parker shared information about the annual University of Kansas pow wow, which the student attended with family and returned visibly transformed.

The student came back so proud, walking a little taller. This is a kid who kind of walks the line of ‘a little bit naughty, a little bit like I’m going to get in trouble.’ They found, I think, part of themselves, and the mom was so thankful and so appreciative.

Tiffany described a parallel reorientation in view of the school’s Title VI program. Prior to the PD, the program had been treated as logistically external to the classroom, with some teachers describing it as a ‘burden’ because students were pulled out of class to attend. After the PD, the same activity was reframed as “actually as important as the content knowledge they’re getting in school,” a shift that parallels what Pewewardy’s (2022) TIPM identifies as a movement from surface-level Contributions and Additive approaches to Transformation. The PD also described the intentionality about establishing connections with Native students and “honoring their culture without just sending them on their way.” Likewise, Riley’s narrative emphasized relational accountability, noting a growing critical understanding that meaningful collaboration with Tribal Nations requires “intentional preparation, fair compensation, and shared respect” rather than performative gestures, and an explicit awareness of the harm caused by tokenizing Indigenous students in classroom discussions.

River’s account documented the inverse condition and made it analytically visible. The work in a large urban district in which, by a personal accounting, no formal relationships with Tribal Nations existed at the building level that could be observed. There was also mention of being unaware of any active Title VI services. River shared,

Currently, we do not have any relationships. And I think that kind of plays into the idea of not knowing or being aware of indigenous cultures even in our local area. We don’t have any ties with any nations here in KCK that I know of.

This account is important because it names the structural absence that the other three participants' stories begin to fill.

While Parker, Riley, and Avery described relationships that the PD prompted them to reframe or deepen, River described an institutional context in which the relational infrastructure had not yet been built and also described a personal role as a vehicle for beginning to build it. At the time of the interview, River was applying for the district's social studies lead position and had already begun thinking about how to use the role to embed Indigenous voices in district-wide PD.

I'm applying to be our social studies lead. How am I going to change social studies just in case I get the role? I can bring in indigenous voices. I'm going to structure PDs next year. I don't even have the job yet, but I'm already thinking about how I can do it.

Across the four cases, the participants moved from treating relationships with Indigenous students and communities as supplementary or absent to treating them as central, a shift that, in practice, reflects what the 4Rs of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility are intended to make visible.

Theme 5: Systemic Barriers to Sustained Implementation

Even as participants described the KACIE PD as transformative, all four identified structural constraints that limited how far that transformation could travel. The barriers they named clustered into four categories: time and resource scarcity, scripted and prescribed curricula, the absence of formal tribal partnerships and official mandates, and the wider political climate. Parker spoke to the first category when describing the difficulty of locating Indigenous-centered primary sources, noting that the work of finding and vetting such materials is downloaded onto individual teachers who already have "crazy amounts of work and very little

time to do it.” Riley’s narrative identified rigid, scripted elementary curricula and the compression of social studies instructional time to as little as 40 minutes per day as constraints that disproportionately limit cross-curricular integration of Indigenous content.

River’s instructional-coach vantage point gave the problem of scripted curricula its sharpest articulation in this study and described a district in which teachers were given pre-prescribed curricula to deliver with fidelity, paragraph by paragraph.

We have pre-prescribed curricula that were given, and we’re forced to use...they say that you’re supposed to look at it beforehand so that you can know what to say and how to say it. But you can literally waltz into the room two seconds before, open it up on page one, and start reading. That’s how it’s written. You say this; students will probably say this; this is how you respond.

River brought a comparative analytic lens to that script and described looking at the same materials through multiple critical eyes, naming how the curriculum’s representational failures cut across multiple racial groups.

I’d already looked at how Black people are portrayed in there. And now I’m looking at it. Okay, so how are Indigenous people portrayed? And I’m like, yeah, this isn’t working. I already knew it wasn’t good for Black people. Now it’s not good for Indigenous people. Like, so who are we actually really serving?

Within that script, River described the entry points for Indigenous content as minimal; the entry points that did exist were structured from a settler perspective, which described a kindergarten unit on Columbus that, in reading, “takes you right to the perspective of Columbus – you don’t have any native voice perspective at all.” River also noted a representational pattern that recurred across the curriculum, in which an individual’s tribal name appears once before the

materials revert to the European-given name. One teacher in the building, near retirement, refused to teach the Columbus unit at all because, in a personal account, stated, “it’s not based in fact.” River also described a fourth-grade unit that touched only briefly on pre-colonial life before moving to a sanitized account of pilgrim-Native encounters: “It’s a lot of like, well, the pilgrims came, and they just wanted peace, and they had a peaceful meal with the native people. It’s like, no.” Going deeper, River stated, “You would have to get in front of those people who make the curriculum and have that conversation, to have native voices centered in that curriculum.”

River also offered a structural recommendation that none of the other participants articulated as directly. It was shared that Tribal Nations partner with the curriculum publishers themselves, on the reasoning that districts will continue to purchase prescribed materials regardless of teacher critique, and the most scalable lever is therefore the source.

If different nations could work with those companies, it could be infused into the products that the schools are already using. And will use. And then that way, when teachers are forced to use it with fidelity, it’s already in there.

River’s “magic-wand” vision imagined a Kansas in which scripted curricula no longer erase Indigenous people, and where teachers are provided the time, flexibility, and Indigenous-centered resources to thoughtfully design their own curriculum. “I would prefer not having scripted curricula, but for teachers to think and use the resources that are out there for us to use. Therefore, having more exposure to projects that center on Indigenous voices.” River also named the labor cost of the work directly: “Once you have the curriculum in front of you, a lot of people don’t want to put in the work. And that’s where the magic occurs. When you put in the work.”

Avery was the most direct about the political category, which identified the framework's vulnerability within the current political moment, sharing,

I think obviously, the anti-DEI policies, if I must take a wild guess as to why the documents are no longer linked on the KSDE's website- it would be so that they have some control or at least knowledge of who is looking at them. I think they really don't want sovereignty taught because they want to portray the story that Native Americans are not here and are not thriving and don't deserve the things that they have.

Avery's analysis was sharper than the other three participants', but the underlying observation, that political and policy environments shape which versions of history are publicly accessible, was repeated in Riley's reference to the absence of legislative mandates supporting Indigenous education in Kansas and to the persistence of performative consultation on issues such as school mascots, and in River's account of districts that purchase prescribed curricula in lieu of building relationships with local Tribal Nations. While less critical of state-level dynamics, Parker identified that Indigenous content is still treated as "an afterthought or an add-on" in much of the existing curriculum and called for state action to provide "more time and resources."

The four cases together suggest that individual educator transformation, while necessary, is not sufficient: without coordinated support from districts, states, publishers, and policy, the gains made through the KACIE PD remain dependent on the discretionary effort of motivated individuals.

Conclusion

This chapter presented findings from four interviews with Kansas educators who participated in the KACIE Essential Understandings professional development. Five interrelated themes were identified through cross-case analysis. First, all four participants described a

pedagogical shift from teaching Indigenous peoples as past-tense subjects toward centering contemporary sovereignty and resilience. Second, the participants attributed that shift to sustained, Indigenous-led professional development and named the presence of tribal leaders, particularly the councilman who presented at the sessions, as a decisive catalyst. Third, sovereignty emerged as a curricular main thread that prompted participants to integrate Indigenous content across disciplines rather than confining it to discrete history units; for River, this embedding began at the elementary level through Indigenous literature and arts, and through PD that introduced colleagues to sovereignty and governance themselves. Fourth, the participants described a reorientation toward relational accountability with Indigenous students, families, and Tribal Nations, in accordance with the 4Rs that grounded this study's methodology, while River's account named the institutional condition in which such relationships did not yet formally exist and described the pursuit of a district leadership role as a vehicle for beginning to build them. Fifth, the participants named institutional obstacles, time and resource scarcity, scripted and prescribed curricula, the absence of legislative mandates and tribal partnerships, and the broader anti-DEI policy climate of 2026, which limit the durability of individual educators' transformation.

Taken together, these results show that the KACIE Essential Understandings framework, when delivered through sustained Indigenous-led professional development and engaged in relationship, can produce meaningful movement along Pewewardy's (2022) Transformational Indigenous Practice Model, but that scaling and sustaining that movement requires structural supports beyond the reach of any single classroom or district coach. Chapter Five will interpret the results in conversation with the existing literature, examine consequences for policy and practice, and offer recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: WOWADITIKA (BRAVERY)

When we come to understand the Dakota tribes of South Dakota's worldview, we are called to learn what it means to be a good relative to oneself, to family, and to community. In doing so, however, it requires bravery to meet the challenges that come with choosing to do something different. Moreover, this work asks us to live within *mitakuye Oyas'in*, the understanding that all things are connected. Thus, bravery is not only an individual act but a relational commitment to live in accordance with these teachings, even when doing so disrupts dominant ways of thinking and being.

This chapter interprets the findings described in Chapter Four in conversation with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and answers the four research questions that guided this study. Drawing on Pewewardy et al.'s (2018) and Pewewardy et al.'s (2022) Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (TIPM) as the organizing analytic frame and on Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork as methodology, the discussion that follows positions the four participants' accounts within the larger scholarly conversation on Indigenous education, professional development, and the Indigenization of K–12 curriculum.

This chapter is organized into seven sections: a brief restatement of the study and summary of findings; a discussion of each of the five themes in relation to TIPM and to the literature; conclusions that respond to the four research questions; implications regarding theory, policy, and practice; recommendations for educators, school systems, and future researchers; a statement of the study's limitations; and a closing reflective researcher reflection that honors the relational and reciprocal commitments of Indigenous Storywork.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how K–12 Kansas educators describe their classroom practice after participating in the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE) professional development series, and how those accounts intersect with my experiences as an Indigenous researcher. Four participants shared their stories: Parker, a seventh-grade social studies teacher in a Kansas public school; Riley, a high school sociology, economics, and government teacher; Avery, a high school teacher in Kansas on the land bordering a Native Nation territory; and River, an elementary instructional coach in Kansas who worked across grades K–5 and across all subject areas.

Each participant completed the KACIE Essential Understandings of Indigenous Nations and Peoples professional development series and consented to share their stories through semi-structured interviews. By using Indigenous Storywork analysis, the study identified five interrelated themes: (a) Shifting from removal to resilience; (b) Indigenous-led professional development boosting educator confidence; (c) Sovereignty as a key integration point; (d) Relational accountability to Indigenous students and communities; and (e) Systemic barriers to lasting change. Each theme is discussed below in relation to its corresponding scholarly literature and to its location within the four dimensions of TIPM.

Indigenous Storywork Findings

From Removal to Resilience: A Pedagogical Shift Toward Contemporary Indigeneity

The first and most consistent finding is a shift away from treating Indigenous peoples as historical artifacts and toward representing them as living, sovereign, and contemporary nations, which directly engages a core problem identified in the literature. Shear et al.'s (2015) analysis of K–12 U.S. and state history standards documented that 86.66% of the standards confined

Indigenous peoples to pre-1900 history, with the result that “teachers, therefore, year after year, reify the hegemonic nature of U.S. history” (p. 76). The participants’ before-PD accounts mirrored this national pattern. Parker described their early instructional approach as keeping Indigenous peoples “stuck in the past,” Riley’s narrative reported isolated boarding-school lessons disconnected from current realities, Avery acknowledged that their teaching reflected a Eurocentric viewpoint, and River described their own pre-PD awareness as “very limited,” noting that as an instructional coach they had not yet considered the past-tense framing embedded in the prescribed elementary curricula they were helping teachers deliver.

The KACIE PD provided the structural and conceptual conditions for what Sabzalian (2019) called the disruption of the orientation of erasure, which she identified as one of the most persistent curricular orientations non-Native teachers bring to Indigenous content. As Sabzalian argued, “the practices of Indigenous erasure are subtle, yet schools remain deeply implicated in the logic of elimination” (p. 19). Within this context, the PD encouraged educators to critically examine and challenge those patterns of erasure in curriculum and practice. In TIPM terms, the shift the participants described maps onto movement from the Contributions and Additive dimensions to the Transformation dimension (Pewewardy et al., 2022).

Parker’s adoption of the framework’s language of “continued to thrive” and their reframing of the work as a movement “from removal up to resilience” enacted exactly the temporal reorientation that Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) called for when they argued for an Indigenous education that refuses the past-tense framing of nineteenth-century federal policy and recognizes the ongoing political life of Tribal Nations. River’s engagement with Dr. Stephanie Fryberg’s data (Fryberg et al., 2023) that a majority of Americans believe Indigenous histories are a thing of the past, and their own articulation that Indigenous nations are “very real present

and also the future,” extended the same temporal reorientation into the elementary instructional-coaching context, where the past-tense framing is reproduced not only by teachers but by the scripted materials they are required to deliver.

The participants’ shift also reflects what Brayboy and Castagno (2009) described as the necessary movement from culturally responsive schooling as an additive gesture toward culturally responsive schooling as Native nation building. That all four participants located this shift in the language of the framework confirms what Sabzalian (2019) demonstrated empirically: meaningful Indigenization is not produced by exposure to Indigenous content alone but by encounters with conceptual tools that reorganize how educators think about time, sovereignty, and Indigenous presence.

Indigenous-Led Professional Development

The participants’ attribution of their pedagogical shifts to Indigenous-led, sustained professional development converges with one of the most consistent findings in the empirical literature on PD for educators of Indigenous students. Lees (2016) study of urban Indigenous community members in collaborative teacher preparation found that sustained relational engagement with Indigenous community members and elders, rather than reading assignments or one-time lectures, was the mechanism that supported teachers’ developmental movement. Castagno’s (2021) account of the Diné Institute for Navajo Nation Educators similarly described a multi-year collaborative in which teachers worked as intellectual partners rather than as “consumers of scripted curriculum” (p. 325).

The National Council for the Social Studies (2018) made the same point at the level of policy when it called for teachers to move “beyond inviting Indigenous Peoples as guest speakers, to including Indigenous Peoples as decision-makers” (p. 172). All four participants in

the present study affirmed these outcomes in their own words. Avery's account of why hearing from Indigenous people "makes a huge difference" echoes Lees's (2016) emphasis on relational engagement. Parker's repeated plea of the tribal councilman who presented at the sessions, and Erica's description of his presence as "very, very, very valuable" because it proved "the relevance of today," together demonstrate what NCSS (2018) named when it distinguished decision-makers from guest speakers; and Riley's expansion of their own classroom invitations to include speakers from Haskell Indian Nations University, the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation operationalizes the relational model that Anthony-Stevens et al. (2020) described as Indigenous teacher education for nation building.

Equally important, all four participants critiqued the one-off PD model. According to McMillan (2025), "Traditional professional development workshops are often ineffective because of fragmented content and the way the material is delivered (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Hunzicker, 2011; Lieberman & Pointer Mac, 2010)" (p. 21). Avery's concern that "if we just continue to have a one-off PD, it's more harmful than useful;" Parker's request for "PD times 100" with mentorship; Riley's identification of one-time PD as a structural barrier; and River's call for "continued PD...from an Indigenous point of view with or led by indigenous folks" together corroborate what Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argued nearly two decades ago, that one-off cultural-awareness sessions "often reinforce stereotypes and position Indigenous cultures as artifacts of the past rather than living political communities" (pp. 947-948). River's description of the boarding-school content as the moment that opened their own "rabbit hole" of continued learning is also notable here; it gives concrete expression to the developmental claim in the literature that sustained PD does not close educators' questions but multiplies them, prompting self-directed learning beyond the formal sessions. Together, these outcomes support

the four features of effective PD highlighted in Chapter Two: PD must be sustained, community-led, sovereignty-centered, and grounded in structured positionality reflection (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2020; Castagno, 2021; Lees, 2016; Pewewardy et al., 2018).

Sovereignty as a Key Integration Point

The third theme, the emergence of sovereignty as the conceptual thread that participants identified as both the most important and the most underdeveloped element of their teaching, sits at the heart of the scholarly conversation that distinguishes Indian education from generic multicultural education. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argued that “all teachers must learn and know about the unique government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the federal government” (p. 973). McCarty and Lee (2014) extended this position, insisting that “tribal sovereignty must include education sovereignty” (p. 102). Brayboy’s (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory supplies the theoretical justification for this position. TribalCrit holds together the racialized and political-legal status of Indigenous peoples as citizens of sovereign nations, an analytic move that no generic culturally responsive framework reproduces.

Parker’s identification of sovereignty and government as the most important next instructional step, Avery’s vision of Indigenous history running “in tandem” with U.S. history rather than in isolated pockets, Riley’s drafting of a K–12 sovereignty curriculum progression spanning early elementary through high school government, and River’s portfolio design that introduced fellow educators to the concepts of sovereignty and governance, together demonstrate that the participants are operating in the analytic space that Brayboy’s (2005) TribalCrit and McCarty and Lee’s (2014) culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy have opened up. Riley’s examination of the General Allotment Act of 1887 in economics, integrating health-disparity

discussions in sociology, and identification of STEM entry points for Indigenous knowledge also reflect Bang and Marin's (2015) call for Indigenous epistemologies in science learning.

River's entry through Indigenous literature and the arts at the K–5 level extends this cross-disciplinary orientation downward into the early grades and is consistent with what Sabzalian (2019) and Shear et al. (2018) argue for at the elementary level: Indigenous sovereignty as a civics inquiry that runs through multiple disciplines rather than as an isolated content addition. In TIPM language, this curricular integration is the move from Additive to Transformation (Pewewardy et al., 2022). It also approaches the Cultural and Social Justice Action dimension when, as in Riley's case, it produces durable curricular artifacts that outlast the PD itself.

Relational Accountability: Centering Indigenous Students, Families, and Communities

The fourth theme is the theme in which this study's findings most explicitly reflect the technique that produced them. Archibald's (2008) *Indigenous Storywork*, organized around the 4Rs of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, treats knowledge as something developed through relationships rather than something extracted from informants. Wilson's (2008) *Research is Ceremony* and Kovach's (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies* extend this orientation by insisting that researchers are accountable not only to the rigor of their methods but also to the communities whose knowledge they engage. The participants' accounts in the present study mirror this relational orientation in their own classroom practice. Parker's account of the student whose grandmother belonged to a Tribal Nation, the student who attended the KU powwow with their family and "came back so proud and walked a little taller," enacts what Cajete (1994) described as Indigenous education grounded in land, community, and relationship. Avery's reframing of the school's Title VI program from functional inconvenience to

instructional priority enacts what Pewewardy et al. (2022) call movement out of Contributions and into Transformation, and a devotion to what Avery says “honoring their culture without just sending them on their way” reflects the relational accountability that Wilson (2008) identifies as the heart of Indigenous research methodology.

River’s account adds a structurally important counterpoint to the same theme. Where Parker, Riley, and Avery each described relationships that the PD prompted them to reframe, deepen, or initiate, River described an institutional context in which, from a personal account, no formal relationships with local Tribal Nations existed at the building level could be observed, and in which there was an unawareness of any active Title VI services. River’s observation that this absence “plays into the idea of not knowing and not being aware of indigenous culture even in our local area” is consistent with what Sabzalian (2019) called the orientation of erasure. River locates this orientation not only in instructional materials and individual teachers but in district-level relational infrastructure. River’s identification of a possible move into the social studies lead role as a vehicle for beginning to build that infrastructure represents, in Pewewardy et al. (2022) terms, an explicit attempt to move from individual transformation toward Cultural and Social Justice Action.

Riley’s narrative also surfaces the necessary critical edge of relational work. The acknowledgment that meaningful collaboration with Tribal Nations requires “intentional preparation, fair compensation, and reciprocal respect” rather than performative gestures, and an explicit awareness of the harm caused by tokenizing Indigenous students in classroom discussions, resonates with what Tuck and Yang (2012) named when they argued that decolonization “is not a metaphor” (p. 28). Symbolic inclusion is not relational accountability; relational accountability requires the material commitments of time, compensation, and decision-

making power, commitments that the literature has consistently identified as the difference between performative and transformational practice (NCSS, 2018; Pewewardy et al., 2022). At the same time, the participants' relational orientations toward their Indigenous students should be read in conversation with Castagno's (2014) critique of the politics of niceness in predominantly white educational spaces. Castagno warns that even well-intentioned relational gestures can become a substitute for substantive engagement with sovereignty and colonial history. The participants' work, taken together, does not fall into that trap precisely because their relational practice is anchored in the sovereignty-centered curriculum integration discussed in the previous section, nor, as in River's case, because the absence of relationships is named as a problem to be addressed rather than a condition to be smoothed over.

Systemic Barriers for Lasting Change

The participants' identification of systemic barriers, such as time scarcity, scripted curricula, the absence of legislative mandates and tribal partnerships, and the wider anti-DEI policy climate of 2026, returns the discussion to the core claim of decolonization theory: that colonization is an ongoing structure rather than a discrete historical episode (Smith, 2021; Wolfe, 2006). Tuck and Yang's (2012) insistence that decolonization is not a metaphor for diversity, equity, and inclusion gains force in a moment when, as Avery observed, the documents linking the state's Indigenous education resources to the Kansas State Department of Education's website have been removed. Avery's observation that political actors "really don't want sovereignty taught because they want to portray the story that Native Americans are not here and are not thriving and don't deserve the things that they have" exemplifies what Wolfe (2006) called the logic of elimination that organizes settler-colonial states. That this logic continues to

operate in 2026 is not a deviation from the federal policy course discussed in Chapter Two but a contemporary expression of it.

The federal policy architecture reviewed in Chapter Two, from the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 through the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and Executive Order 13592 (2011), establishes legal mechanisms for tribal consultation and culturally relevant education; however, as Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) have shown, these mechanisms operate against the friction of standardized accountability systems that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 institutionalized.

Riley's identification of the compression of social studies instructional time to as little as 40 minutes per day and the prevalence of scripted elementary curricula reflects the downstream effects of these accountability regimes. River's account from inside the elementary instructional-coaching role demonstrated these effects in concrete terms: a kindergarten unit on Columbus written entirely from the settler perspective, a fourth-grade unit that rendered pre-colonial life cursorily before moving to a sanitized account of pilgrim-Native encounters, and a curriculum-fidelity expectation under which a teacher could "waltz in the room two seconds before, open it up on page one, and start reading." River's question, "Who is this really serving?," aligns with the literature's critique of culturally additive curricula (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Sabzalian, 2019), and the structural recommendation that Tribal Nations partner with curriculum publishers names a leverage point that the literature has identified less directly: that as long as districts continue to purchase prescribed materials, the most scalable site of intervention is the publisher rather than the individual teacher.

Parker's identification of the resource and time burden placed on individual teachers locates the problem at the district level, where the Title VI mechanisms enabled by the Indian

Education Act of 1972 are inconsistently funded and implemented (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). River's account of a large urban district in which there was an unawareness of active Title VI services reinforces this concern at the implementation level. Taken together, the participants' accounts of barriers fail to undermine the gains made through the KACIE PD; rather, they specify the structural conditions, scripted curricula, publisher influence, district relational infrastructure, state policy, and the political climate under which those gains will or will not endure. As Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argued, the durability of culturally responsive schooling depends on institutional change rather than the heroic efforts of individual teachers.

Connecting the Findings to the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model

The five themes describe a developmental trajectory that maps onto Pewewardy et al.'s (2018, 2022) four dimensions of TIPM. The participants' before-PD accounts, isolated boarding-school lessons (Riley), past-tense framings of Indigenous peoples (Parker), a Eurocentric viewpoint (Avery), and very narrow awareness of contemporary tribal nations (River), sit within the Contributions dimension, where Indigenous peoples appear as historical figures whose presence is added to an otherwise unaltered curriculum.

Their post-PD accounts of embedding Indigenous primary sources, language, and content into existing units and, in River's case, of building PD materials that introduce colleagues to the framework and the concepts of sovereignty and governance demonstrate movement into the Additive dimension. The shift toward sovereignty as a curricular main thread (Theme 3) and the relational reorientation toward Indigenous students, families, and Tribal Nations, including the explicit naming of relational absence (Theme 4), demonstrate movement into the Transformation dimension, where curriculum and pedagogy are reorganized through Indigenous perspectives. Riley's drafting of a K–12 sovereignty curriculum progression and their explicit critique of

performative consultation, Parker's volunteer leadership of resource-sharing sessions in the district, and River's pursuit of the social studies lead role with the explicit intent of structuring Indigenous-led PD across the district begin to approach the Cultural and Social Justice Action dimension, where teacher learning becomes institutional advocacy. The wave-jumping metaphor that Pewewardy et al. (2022) used to describe TIPM is apt: the participants' movement is non-linear, partial, and ongoing, and the system-wide barriers identified in Theme 5 represent the wave conditions against which they are jumping.

Conclusion

The findings of this study support four conclusions that respond directly to the research questions that organized the study. First, in response to the question of how K–12 educators describe their previous classroom practices after participating in KACIE professional development (RQ1), the data indicate that participants describe their prior practices as static, history-bound, and determined by the absence of conceptual tools for thinking about contemporary tribal sovereignty. Their accounts confirm at the level of individual practice what Shear et al. (2015) documented at the level of state standards: the dominant treatment of Indigenous peoples in K–12 social studies confines them to a pre-1900 frame. River's account extends this conclusion to the elementary instructional-coaching role, in which the past-tense framing is reproduced not only by teachers but by the scripted materials they are required to deliver.

Second, in response to the question of how educators describe their intentions to alter future classroom practices (RQ2), the data indicate that participants articulate intentions that are sovereignty-centered, cross-curricular, and relational. Their intentions describe a movement from Contributions and Additive practice toward Transformation in TIPM terms (Pewewardy et al.,

2022), and in some cases approach the Cultural and Social Justice Action dimension through curriculum design, district-level advocacy, and, in River's case, the active pursuit of a district leadership role through which Indigenous-led PD could be institutionalized.

Third, in response to the question of how participant responses intersect with the researcher's lived experiences as an Indigenous person and professional educator (RQ3), the data indicate substantial intersection at the levels of relational practice and analysis. Parker's story of the Tribal Nation student, Avery's reframing of the Title VI program, Riley's relational invitations to Tribal Nations, and River's naming of the absent relational infrastructure in their own district align with the researcher's experiences of relational teaching and learning. Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit tenet that story is theory legitimizes this intersection as analytic rather than a bias to be bracketed.

Fourth, in response to the question of what impact the KACIE professional development has on educator approaches, including reflection on practice, engagement with Indigenous communities, and Indigenization of curriculum (RQ4), the data indicate that the KACIE PD produced noticeable changes on all three dimensions for all four participants. Each participant described increased reflection on prior practice, greater engagement with Indigenous communities and presenters, and concrete moves toward Indigenization of their curriculum or, in River's case, of the PD their colleagues receive. The durability of these shifts, however, will depend on the structural supports identified in the discussion of Theme 5.

Implications

The outcomes extend the empirical base for TIPM (Pewewardy et al., 2018, 2022) into the specific context of Kansas K–12 social studies and elementary instructional coaching and demonstrate that TIPM functions effectively as both an analytic and an evaluative lens for

interpreting educator accounts of their practice. The findings additionally strengthen the value of Archibald's (2008) Indigenous Storywork as a methodology that produces relationally rich, theoretically generative data without fragmenting participants' accounts into decontextualized codes. The intersection of the researcher's lived experience with the participants' stories, foregrounded by RQ3 and grounded in Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit, demonstrates the analytic productivity of treating Indigenous lived experience as theory.

Implications for Policy

The evidence shows that state and district policy actors play a key role in maintaining the gains produced by Indigenous-led PD. The Title VI mechanisms authorized by the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the tribal consultation requirements strengthened by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 provide existing legal infrastructure that remains underutilized in Kansas, a condition River's account makes especially visible at the urban-district level.

The participants' identification of state-level barriers, ranging from scripted curricula to the removal of Indigenous education resources from the state's website, indicates that policy change at the Kansas State Department of Education is necessary to make the gains individual educators have made durable. Without such policy support, the work of educators like Parker, Riley, Avery, and River remains dependent on individual discretion, a dependency that the literature has consistently identified as insufficient for structural reform (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

Implications for Practice

For practicing educators and instructional coaches, the findings show that the KACIE Essential Understandings framework, when engaged through sustained Indigenous-led PD, is a workable instrument for moving teaching practice along the TIPM dimensions. The participants'

accounts identify specific entry points: sovereignty as a curricular main thread, relational engagement with Tribal Nations, the combining of Indigenous primary sources across subject areas, and, at the elementary level, the deliberate inclusion of Indigenous literature and arts produced today. River's portfolio work also demonstrates that instructional coaches can serve as multipliers, designing locally tailored PD that introduces colleagues to sovereignty and governance, thereby widening the pool of teachers prepared to engage with the framework. The findings also affirm the centrality of relational accountability: the 4Rs of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008) are not only a research methodology but a framework for everyday classroom practice.

Recommendations

For Educators

Educators and instructional coaches are urged to seek sustained, multi-session, Indigenous-led professional development rather than relying on one-off cultural-awareness sessions, which the literature consistently identifies as insufficient (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Lees, 2016). The finding of this study further supports this recommendation, as participation in the KACIE professional development provided sustained opportunities for education to deepen their understanding of Tribal sovereignty, contemporary Indigenous experiences, and the integration of Indigenous perspectives across curriculum and instruction. Anthony-Stevens et al. (2020) cautioned that "one-shot workshops and courses do not encourage the depth of change desired" (p. 4). This reinforces the need for sustained professional development that promotes continuous learning, reflection, and long-term engagement with Indigenous knowledge and Tribal communities. Educators are further encouraged to treat sovereignty as a central curricular theme rather than a single instructional unit and to integrate Indigenous primary sources and

perspectives across disciplines, including civics, economics, sociology, the language arts, and STEM (Bang & Marin, 2015; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Shear et al., 2018). At the elementary level, it is recommended that educators bring contemporary Indigenous literature and arts into K–5 classrooms as a primary entry point. Finally, educators are advised to build sustained relational partnerships with Indigenous students, families, and Tribal Nations through their school’s Title VI program, where one exists, and to advocate for establishing a Title VI program where one does not.

For Local Education Agencies

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are encouraged to budget for sustained Indigenous-led PD rather than for episodic workshops, to compensate Indigenous education knowledge keepers and Tribal Nation representatives at appropriate professional rates for their time and expertise, and to formalize relationships with local Tribal Nations through written memoranda of understanding rather than through informal consultation. Leaders are further encouraged to audit their own curriculum maps for the over-concentration of Indigenous content in pre-1900 history, as documented by Shear et al. (2015), and, building on River’s account, to audit their adopted scripted curricula for the perspective from which Indigenous content is presented and for the entry points teachers are given to revise it. Districts that purchase prescribed curricula are encouraged to require publishers to demonstrate Tribal Nation involvement in the development of Indigenous content. Finally, LEAs are encouraged to support teacher leaders and instructional coaches, such as the participants in this study, in district-level resource sharing, PD design, and curriculum development.

For State Education Agencies

State Education Agencies (SEAs) are encouraged to restore and expand publicly accessible Indigenous education resources on the Kansas State Department of Education's website, to convene and adequately fund the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education as a sustained statewide partnership instead of as a periodic initiative, and to establish formal Tribal Nation consultation protocols that meet the spirit of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. SEAs are also encouraged to consider legislative mandates that support the embedding of Indigenous education across K–12 social studies, as several other states have begun to enact.

For Future Research

Future research is encouraged to extend this work in several directions. First, a longitudinal study of KACIE PD participants would document the durability of the shifts identified in this study and would clarify the conditions under which TIPM movement is sustained or reversed. Second, a comparative study of educators across Kansas districts with and without functioning Title VI programs would specify the role of institutional infrastructure in supporting individual teacher growth, a question that River's account raises with particular urgency. Third, a study that centers the voices of Indigenous students and builds on Sabzalian's (2019) classroom-based work on Indigenous children's survivance would complement the educator-focused analysis offered here. Fourth, research that examines the role of Tribal Nations as decision-makers, not only as guest presenters, in the design of state-level professional development and in the development of K–12 curriculum products by major publishers would respond to NCSS's (2018) call and would extend the work of Castagno (2021) and Anthony-Stevens et al. (2020) into the Kansas context.

Limitations

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the sample of four participants, while consistent with the depth orientation of qualitative study and Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008), limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the participants self-selected into the KACIE PD and are therefore not representative of the larger population of Kansas educators; their reported shifts may reflect a baseline of motivation that is not present in non-participating peers. Third, the data consist of educators' self-reports rather than direct observations of classroom or coaching practice, and the durability of participants' reported intentions cannot be verified within the time frame of this study. Finally, the researcher's positionality as an Indigenous educator and KACIE collaborator is both an analytic asset, as TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) makes clear, and a relational reality that may have shaped what participants chose to share. These limitations are noted not as faults but as part of the relational accountability that Indigenous Storywork requires the researcher to make visible.

Researcher Reflection

Grounded in Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008), this study calls me to honor the stories shared with me by taking responsibility, in closing, for what we have learned and how those teachings move forward. The 4Rs, which include respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, frame this examination. Out of respect for Parker, Riley, Avery, and River, I have attempted to present their accounts in their own words and on their own terms, resisting the temptation to fragment their stories into decontextualized codes. The relevance of their stories goes beyond the Kansas context to any state where non-Native educators are working to teach about Indigenous nations and peoples, and to any district where instructional coaches are building the relational and curricular infrastructure that such teaching requires. Reciprocity is

honored in the devotion to return this study to its participants and the KACIE community for use in future professional development design. Responsibility is honored in the dedication to translating the findings into the policy and practice recommendations offered above and to sustaining the relational work that participants and the KACIE PD's community have made possible. My lived experience as an Indigenous educator from a tribal nation with treaty and trust relationships to the United States is the perspective through which this study was conducted, and the intersection of that lived experience with the participants' stories is, per Brayboy (2005), itself a form of theory.

Closing

This study also reinforces an important distinction within Indigenous education. American Indians and Alaska Natives occupy a unique political status as citizens of sovereign Tribal Nations, a relationship grounded in treaties, federal law, and the federal trust responsibility rather than in diversity initiatives alone. Indigenous education, therefore, should not be understood as an extension of broader debates surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) or critical race theory (CRT), but as an educational responsibility rooted in Tribal sovereignty, nation-to-nation relationships, and the accurate teaching of Indigenous histories, governments, and contemporary Tribal Nations.

The KACIE Essential Understandings framework, delivered through sustained Indigenous-led professional development and engaged in reciprocal relationships with Tribal Nations, demonstrated the capacity to move educators along the dimensions of the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model. The four participants in this study moved meaningfully and visibly along that trajectory. Whether their movement will be sustained and whether it will be joined by the institutional and policy support it requires depends on choices

beyond the control of any single classroom or district coach. The work of Indigenous education in Kansas, as in the greater United States, is the work of many waters and many wave-jumpers.

This study honors four of them and contributes its small share to the longer current.

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Appendix A

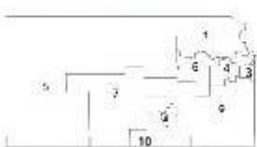
Essential Understanding Framework for Educators

Indigenous Peoples and Nations of Kansas: Past, Present, and Futures

Kansas Advisory Council for Education, Essential Understanding Framework for Educators



Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.



SUCCESS DEFINED

A successful Kansas high school graduate has the

- Academic preparation,
- Cognitive preparation,
- Technical skills,
- Employability skills and
- Civic engagement

to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation.

OUTCOMES

- Social-emotional growth
- Kindergarten readiness
- Individual Plan of Study
- Civic engagement
- Academically prepared for postsecondary
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary success



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MISSION

To prepare Kansas students for lifelong success through rigorous, quality academic instruction, career training and character development according to each student's gifts and talents.

VISION

Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

MOTTO

Kansans Can

COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION	DEPUTY COMMISSIONER Division of Fiscal and Administrative Services	DEPUTY COMMISSIONER Division of Learning Services
		
Dr. Randy Watson Randy.Watson@ksde.gov	Dr. Frank Harwood Frank.Harwood@ksde.gov	Dr. Ben Proctor Ben.Proctor@ksde.gov

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Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

Jan. 25, 2025

Introduction

Collaborative Construction of this Framework:

Kansas is, and always has been, home to many unique Tribal Nations and peoples. Nevertheless, substantive Native representation is missing from many Kansas classrooms. Additionally, while there are four Federally Recognized Tribal Nations—Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska—within Kansas boundaries, a significant number of citizens of other Federally Recognized Tribal Nations also continue to live in and migrate to this state.

This Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education (KACIE) Essential Understanding framework, collaboratively developed with Federally Recognized Tribal Nations with relevant ties to Kansas, is intended to help educators improve teaching and learning about, for, and with these Tribal Nations, peoples, and communities. This document was produced based on feedback collected from these Tribal Nations and partners concerning what Kansas students should learn about Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures. The framework and resources provided are a result of this partnership.

Introducing the Framework: The Essential Understanding

This single Essential Understanding was collaboratively crafted to focus around one core concept. This Essential Understanding is layered and complex to help Kansas educators incorporate this material into all relevant aspects of their curriculum, not just social studies.

Specifically, while studying the past to understand the future is important, this Essential Understanding emphasizes how Tribal Nations **continue to thrive in the present**, as independent and diverse sovereign governments, communities, and people.

Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education's - Essential Understandings Task Force:

The Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education's - Essential Understandings Task Force (KACIE - EUTF) was formed at the behest of the KACIE board to identify and create an educational framework for the educators of Kansas as they continue to improve and enhance the learning experiences for all their students. Moving forward, conversations with Tribal Nations will continue through ongoing consultation, in recognition that Kansas is Indigenous land and there is a need for ongoing dialogue and collaborative learning.

- Dr. Alex Red Corn (Osage), University of Kansas
- Raphael Wahwassuck (Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation), Tribal Council
- Kenneth St. Pierre (Yankton Sioux), University of Washington
- Jon Boursaw (Citizen Potawatomi Nation), Tribal Representative
- Olivia Brien (Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska)
- Dr. Lisa Tatonetti, Kansas State University
- Dr. Tai Edwards, Johnson County Community College
- Yale Taylor (Choctaw), USD 501
- Dal Domebo (Kiowa), USD 259
- Veronica Gillette, USD 259
- Aaric Davis, USD 337
- Rebecca Kramer, USD 430

SUB-TOPICS | ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS FRAMEWORK FOR KANSAS EDUCATORS

Essential Understanding and Sub-Topics

The Kansas Essential Understanding:

*Indigenous Nations and Peoples affiliated with Kansas **CONTINUE TO THRIVE** despite forced removals, relocations, and assaults on their sovereign governments, cultures, and identities.*

While the Essential Understanding focuses educators on a single concept, it is divided into nine interdisciplinary sub-topics. The sub-topics—in no particular order—identify content that can be integrated into every part of the curriculum from Economics and Social Studies, to English Language Arts, Science, and beyond.

The subtopics include:

- Collaborative Citizenship and Co-Existence
- Indigenous Languages
- Economics
- Histories and Geographies
- Sovereignty and Governance
- Health, Wellness and Foodways
- Literature and Arts
- Urban and Inter-Tribal Communities
- Indigenous STEM



Collaborative Citizenship and Co-Existence

Like all civilizations, Tribal Nations have long and storied histories of conflict and cooperation with neighboring Nations. Today, Federally Recognized Tribal Nations each have their own criteria for enrollment and citizenship. Their Tribal citizens live in and across complex multiracial social networks with non-Native peoples and communities. This is due to histories of **1) forced removals and relocations, 2) assimilationist policies and programming (i.e., Boarding Schools), 3) forced and voluntary relocations of other non-Native demographic groups through the development of what is now called the United States**. As a result, in the present, Tribal citizens are often multiracial and live in and/or near predominantly non-Native communities, meaning that they learn to exist and co-exist across different socio-cultural contexts and communities.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- With so many efforts to assimilate and eradicate Indigenous cultures, it should be no surprise that many Tribal citizens, or descendants of Tribal citizens, are of mixed race/ethnicity. Many Tribal citizens are also White, Black, and/or Latinx and Hispanic (among many other races/ethnicities or National citizenship). These Tribal citizens are also often made invisible in “multi-racial” or “two or more races” demographic data systems.
- For many Federally Recognized Tribal Nations, the majority of their citizens do not live on reservations, and therefore, Tribal governments work to build their government structures and programs accordingly. As an example, the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, headquartered in Shawnee, Oklahoma, has approximately 3000 Tribal citizens in Kansas and a local representative in their government specifically serves that demographic. Relatedly, many Nations have absentee mail-in ballots, while other Tribal Nations require in-person voting on the reservation.
- Many Tribal citizens routinely commute or migrate back and forth between reservation-based home communities, events, and ceremonies to homes in different states.
- Over 90% of American Indian and Alaskan Native students attend public schools, most often in mixed communities with non-Native majorities.
- Federally Recognized Tribal Nations and their employees and citizens often work with neighboring boards, municipalities, and state governments on projects related to education, infrastructure, business development, tourism, and more. Many Tribal Nations are often the largest employers in the region.
- Many non-Native people work for Tribal Nations and their affiliate institutions, and vice versa.
- Federally funded urban relocation programs, in the 1950s and '60s caused many Tribal citizens to leave their reservations and move into cities. More on this in the Urban and Inter-Tribal section below.

Indigenous Languages

Language bears culture, and Indigenous languages are the foundations of Indigenous cultures and identities.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- Indigenous Nation has its own Indigenous language and dialects.
- In North America, Indigenous languages are divided into language families. Numerous nations possess related dialects that share similar words and structures, which are often mutually intelligible (understood).
- Federal assimilation programs, including Federal Indian boarding schools, attempted to systematically eradicate Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities. The first Federal Indian boarding school run by the U.S. government, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879, led to hundreds of federal boarding schools, including seven in Kansas. Many such Federally funded and religious -based assimilationist school operated in what became Kansas, include Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas.
- Today, many Tribal Nations operate language revitalization programs to expand literacy and usage, promote cultural vitality, and undo the damage of assimilation policies. Other programs include Title III and the Seal of Bilingual program in Kansas.

Economics

Since time immemorial, Indigenous Nations have engaged in economic activities. These activities included extensive trade networks, adaptations to the environment and unique demands, and negotiations with Indigenous and Foreign nations. Tribal Nations, like all nations, engage in systems of production, consumption, and exchange. Today Tribal Nations continue to engage in innovative economic activities, vital economic development, and determine services to citizens as an extension of sovereignty to fulfill their Nation's goals that benefit not only the Tribal Nation, local and state communities, the United States, and diverse global partners.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- Tribal Nations engage in a multitude of economic activities that are unique to each nation and its location.
- Tribal Nations engage in a diverse array of business enterprise efforts. Examples include agriculture, aquaponics, ranching, business and finance, hunting, eco-tourism, sports management, manufacturing, textiles, aeronautics research and technology development, gaming, etc.
- Tribal Nations are often the leading employers in their communities and states, and the largest drivers of economic development.

SUB-TOPICS | ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS FRAMEWORK FOR KANSAS EDUCATORS

Histories and Geographies

Tribal Nations have had communities in what is now called Kansas for thousands of years. Forced removals of these Tribal Nations as they relate to Kansas are complex.

There are three distinct complexities to consider:

1. Many Tribal Nations are Indigenous to what is now called Kansas.
2. Over 40 Tribal Nations were forcibly moved into Kansas in the 1800s, and then later removed again (most to what is now Oklahoma).
3. There are four Federally Recognized Nations currently headquartered in Kansas—Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas, Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, and Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska—yet many other tribes have citizens, land, and sacred & historic sites within the state.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- The land known today as the state of Kansas encompasses the ancestral homelands of many Tribal Nations, including the Kanza (Kaw Nation)—for whom the state is named—the Osage, Wichita, Pawnee, Comanche, Kiowa, Apache, Cheyenne, and Arapaho.
- The U.S. government also forcibly moved many Tribal Nations from East of the Mississippi River to the central portion of “Indian Territory” (now known as Kansas) during the mid-1800s, including the Shawnee, Wyandotte, Delaware, Miami, Potawatomi, and others, before another forced removal to the southern portion of “Indian Territory” (now known as Oklahoma). All of these Tribal Nations have citizens currently living in Kansas.
- The Four Federally Recognized Tribal Nations still headquartered in Kansas—Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas, Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska and, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation—have relative Tribal Nations that share their history and name (example: Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma), as many Nations experienced divisions and fracturing through the removal process.

Sovereignty and Governance

The inalienable rights of Indigenous Nations, as U.S. Federally Recognized Tribal Nations, include the right to self-govern and to pursue self-determination.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- Tribal Nations retain sovereignty that predates European colonization of the continent, rooted in their long histories of self-governance.
- Today, U.S. Federally Recognized Tribal Nations have a unique Domestic Dependent Nation status with the U.S. government, often called Federal Trust Responsibility.
- Tribal sovereignty is connected to the Commerce Clause and Article Six of the U.S. Constitution, the Marshall Trilogy (U.S. Supreme Court cases), and further acknowledged through Nation-to-Nation treaties and compacts that are legally binding today.
- Each Tribal Nation has their own constitution, unique government structures, laws, policies, and citizenship requirements. As of 2026, there are 575 Federally Recognized Tribal Nations in the U.S., and four Federally Recognized Tribal Nations headquartered within Kansas boundaries (Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas, and Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska). Tribal Nations with historical ties to Kansas, now headquartered in other states, also own various parcels of land in Kansas.

Health, Wellness and Foodways

Indigenous health, wellness and foodways are foundational and directly connected to each Tribal Nations' culture and sovereignty. Historically, these foodways were complex networks of knowledge about and relationships to particular lands, lakes and waterways, plants, animals, and neighboring Nations pre-Colonization. Indigenous Health, Wellness and Foodways were severely disrupted by removals, boarding school systems, and urbanization policies of the United States. Non-Native incursions into land also led to overgrazing, overhunting, and the exploitation of resources. Indigenous peoples' forced relocations from their homelands were paired with the introduction of government commodity food programs that dramatically changed the health and wellness of Tribal communities.

For example, the rapid rise in diabetes relates directly to introducing high flour and sugar diets obtained through commodity programs.

Today, a multitude of Tribal Nations are putting significant resources and energy towards rekindling these relationships with land and re-establishing trade networks and foodways. As a result, various health, wellness and foodway programs in Tribal Nations are intertwined with the culture and future prosperity of these Nations. Often, this revitalization of Indigenous Health, Wellness and Foodways is framed as *Food Sovereignty*.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- Indigenous Health and Wellness has a long history based on practices and beliefs based on the idea that health and wellness is a balance of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of life. Indigenous communities also view health as directly related to the natural environment, community, and land, and is critical to understanding the individuality of each Tribal Nation.
- Land and culture are so intertwined that understanding this connectedness allows for a deeper understanding of Indigenous language learning.
- Each Tribal Nation has its own unique Health, Wellness, and Foodways. All four of the Federally Recognized Tribes in Kansas have specific food sovereignty efforts in motion, such as Bison programming, greenhouse production, honey production, hemp production, and regenerative agriculture programming.
- Some Tribal Nations with historic ties to Kansas but currently headquartered in Oklahoma have land in Kansas used for agricultural production.
- ***Water Sovereignty***, a term frequently used in connection to health, wellness, and foodways, refers to Native Nations rights to manage the water that produces the life and food that translates to individual and community health. In many Tribal Nations, there are histories of water quality issues, such as in the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas. Additionally, throughout the 1900s, reservoirs were often created on tribal lands, further diminishing their reservations. (See, for example, the Kaw Nation and the flooding of Washunga, Oklahoma.) Furthermore, challenges such as the Dakota Access Pipeline Protest are rooted in historic treaty negotiations and water quality threats.

Literature and Arts

Indigenous stories, whether they be visual (from pictographs to contemporary television and film), written (from the Popul Vuh to the award-winning novels and poetry of contemporary authors), or oral (from traditional oral histories and songs to hip hop and slam poetry) are central to Native cultures and communities. Literature, music, film, and arts of all kinds offer a window to past and present Indigenous resilience, creativity, and joy.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- Visual, written, and oral literatures and arts have existed in the Americas since time immemorial.
- Indigenous literature in English has existed since the 1700s. The rise of these English language texts is tied to the imposition of Christianity and boarding schools; however, Native intellectuals used English to their own ends, telling the stories important to them.
- In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indigenous artists and activists were widely published, producing best-selling stories, poems, non-fiction, and novels. In some cases, these creatives traveled from the U.S. to Canada and Europe on speaking tours.
- While Native peoples have always been writers, Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday's 1969 Pulitzer Prize winning for his novel *House Made of Dawn* marks the start of what later would be termed the Native American Renaissance. Leslie Silko, Simon Ortiz, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Louise Erdrich, and U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo are some of the key writers to publish in this period.
- Today, Indigenous writers, filmmakers, musicians, and artists are flourishing and there is an array of creative arts (literature, film, television, podcasts, video games, music and more) for children, young adults, and adults that are vital expressions of cultural and visual sovereignty.

Urban and Inter-Tribal Communities

Ongoing forced relocations and removals to isolated lands created the reservation system that led to the complex geographic existence of Tribal Nations. The 1900s also saw large migrations from reservations into urban centers. This was amplified in the 1950s and 60s when the federal government worked to extinguish Tribal sovereignty (often referred to as the Termination Era) and launched urban relocation programs. This resulted in the growth of unique Inter-Tribal urban-based "Indian Centers" in cities such as Wichita, Kansas City, Chicago, Minneapolis, Phoenix, and more. Unique and diverse inter-tribal communities came together to produce an eclectic and multi-generational community in which Tribal citizens grow up "off-rez," with varying degrees of connectedness to their home community, Tribal Nation, and affiliated cultures.

Foundational information to know before teaching these topics includes, but is not limited to:

- Wichita Public Schools has more American Indian/Alaska Native students than any other school district in Kansas. Also, Wichita has the Mid-America All-Indian Museum (formerly the Mid-America All-Indian Center), which serves as a central gathering place for Tribal citizens living in the Wichita Area.
- Lawrence, Kansas is an Inter-Tribal community that hosts many social gatherings, such as powwows and social dances. Lawrence is also the home to Haskell Indian Nations University, which serves Tribal citizens of all 575 Federally Recognized Tribal Nations.
- Kansas City is home to the Kansas City Indian Center, which also serves as a hub for cultural events and social services.
- Topeka, which is just south of the four Federally Recognized Tribal Nations in Kansas, is an urban hub for Tribal citizens who commute to/from those reservations for work, entertainment, ceremonies, and social gatherings.

Resource Evaluation

Use the rubric below to evaluate current and potential resources.

Scoring Category	RESOURCE EVALUATION RUBRIC				Score
	1 Unacceptable	2 Developing	3 Acceptable	4 Exemplary	
Agency and Sovereignty	Resources DO NOT include, recognize, or acknowledge Indigenous perseverance, innovative and strategic decision making, sovereignty, and Indigenous resilience.	Resources vaguely reference or mention Indigenous perseverance, innovative and strategic decision making, sovereignty, and Indigenous resilience.	Resources passively imply or demonstrate Indigenous perseverance, innovative and strategic decision making, sovereignty, and Indigenous resilience.	Resources clearly and explicitly demonstrate Indigenous perseverance, innovative and strategic decision making, sovereignty, and Indigenous resilience.	
Representation, Tokenism, and Stereotypes	Resources ONLY include, recognize, or acknowledge Indigenous peoples or nations in stereotypical or tokenized ways who are not equals OR does not include Indigenous peoples or nations AT ALL .	Resources vaguely reference or mention Indigenous sovereignty, culture, and individuals as equals in all contexts.	Resources passively imply or demonstrate Indigenous sovereignty, culture, and individuals as equals in all contexts.	Resources clearly and explicitly demonstrate Indigenous sovereignty, culture, and individuals as equals in all contexts.	
Language Choices (past tense v. present tense)	Language used DOES NOT include, recognize, or acknowledge that Tribal Nations and Peoples still exist in the present tense.	Language used vaguely references or mentions that Tribal Nations and Peoples still exist in the present tense.	Language used passively implies or indicates that Tribal Nations and Peoples still exist in the present tense.	Language used clearly and explicitly indicates that Tribal Nations and Peoples still exist in the present tense.	
Language Choices (Specificity of Native Nations or Communities v. Generic Pan-Indianism)	Language used DOES NOT include, recognize, or acknowledge that Tribal Nations, communities, and regions are unique and distinct, and language reinforces stereotypes that “all Natives are the same” stereotypes.	Language used vaguely implies that Tribal Nations, communities, and regions are unique and distinct. (i.e. vaguely pushes back against “all Natives are the same” stereotypes).	Language used passively implies that Tribal Nations, communities, and regions are unique and distinct, as often as possible (i.e. passively pushes back against “all Natives are the same” stereotypes).	Language used clearly and explicitly demonstrates that Tribal Nations, communities, and regions are unique and distinct, as often as possible (i.e. actively pushes back against “all Natives are the same” stereotypes).	



For more contact information, Contact:

Nathan McAlister
 Humanities Program Manager
 History Government, and Social Studies
 Career, Standards, and Assessment Services
 785 296-3892
nathan.mcalister@ksde.gov



Kansas State Department of Education
 900 S.W. Jackson Street, Suite 102
 Topeka, KS 66612-1212
www.ksde.org

Appendix B

Invitation Letter

Name

Address

Contact

Date

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Kenneth St. Pierre, and I am an enrolled citizen of the Yankton Sioux Tribe (Ihanktonwan Nation), a veteran, and a lifelong educator committed to the success of Indigenous students. I am currently conducting research as part of my doctoral studies. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a study that seeks to better understand how certified educators in Kansas engage with the “*Indigenous Peoples and Nations of Kansas: Past, Present, and Futures*” Essential Understanding framework published by the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) in collaboration with the Kansas Advisory Council for Indian Education (KACIE).

This research explores how teachers interpret, implement, and experience this framework in their professional roles. The goal is to highlight strengths, identify challenges, and promote promising practices that respect the sovereignty, cultures, and contemporary lives of Tribal Nations affiliated with the state of Kansas.

You are invited because of your experience as a certified educator in Kansas. Your insights are valuable and will contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen relationships between Tribal Nations and education systems, as well as to create learning environments where Indigenous students feel seen, valued, and supported.

Participation involves:

- An invitation to participate in one or two interview sessions (via Zoom or in person), lasting about 60 to 90 minutes each.
- Interviews focused on each participant's understanding of the Essential Understanding framework, its impact on their work, and perspectives on Indigenous education.
- Review of your interview transcript to ensure accuracy and clarity.

Participation is voluntary and confidential. No names or identifying information will be shared in the research findings unless you explicitly grant permission. This study has been carefully designed with great respect for the communities and educators it serves and has received approval through the appropriate institutional review processes.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact me at ksp3444@uw.edu or (785) 393-0998. I would be honored to discuss this further and answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your commitment to education and for considering this invitation. Your voice matters, and your involvement would make a meaningful contribution to this essential work.

Very Respectful,

Kenneth St. Pierre

Appendix C

Consent Form



INFORMATION ABOUT A UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON RESEARCH

STUDY

From Past to Present: Reclaiming Indigenous Education Through Relationship, Sovereignty, and Systemic Change in Kansas

What is this study about?

We are conducting this study to understand how relationships between Kansas teachers and local state systems influence the educational experiences of Indigenous students, particularly in fostering a sense of belonging, cultural representation, and systemic change. Participants are being invited because they are educators, administrators, or have direct experience or involvement in Indian education programs, policy implementation, or collaborative efforts between schools in Kansas.

What will you be asked to do?

Suppose you decide to participate in this study. In that case, we will ask you to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes, with two to three rounds, either in person or via video conferencing, depending on your preference and availability. The interview will explore participants' experiences with building and maintaining relationships between schools and Tribal Nations, their perceptions of how these relationships affect Indigenous student belonging and representation, and their insights on systemic barriers or enablers to effective collaboration. Participants may also be asked to review and reflect on portions of the Kansas Essential Understandings framework and provide feedback on its implementation. Follow-up communication may occur to clarify statements or offer participants the opportunity to review and approve their interview transcripts, which will take an additional 30 minutes. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all procedures are designed to respect and uphold the cultural values and sovereignty of Tribal Nations.

Why might you want, or not want, to participate?

Amplify Indigenous voices and experiences in shaping education systems that more accurately reflect and serve Tribal Nations. Contribute to systemic change by helping identify barriers and strategies for improving educational outcomes and cultural representation for Indigenous students. Strengthen relationships between schools and Tribal Nations by sharing successful practices, challenges, and community insights. Honor their role as educators, leaders, or community members with valuable lived experience that can inform policies, practices, and professional development. Help future generations by contributing to research that aims to decolonize education and foster a sense of belonging and identity for Indigenous youth.

How will we protect the information you provide?

The information you provide will be anonymous, meaning that your name will not be associated with the data.

Other information about this study.

Being in this study is voluntary. This means that you can refuse to sign up. It also means that if you do sign up, you can decide to stop being in the study at any time without penalty.

A copy of the consent form will be emailed to you at the email address that you provide. It will be a “PDF” document. Most computers already have PDF viewer software installed, which allows you to open, read, and print the consent form. The email we send you will include a link to PDF viewer software (such as Adobe Acrobat Reader) in case your computer doesn’t already have it. If you would prefer to receive a paper copy of the consent form at no cost to you, please contact the researcher(s) listed in this consent form.

What can you do if you want more information?

Talk to the study team. We are here to help you understand the study. Please don't hesitate to ask us any questions you may have, even if they're not addressed in this document. It is our responsibility to provide you with the necessary information to make an informed decision and to allow you sufficient time to consider whether you wish to proceed with signing up.

Talk to someone else. If you want to talk about the study with someone who is not part of the study team, talk about your rights as a research participant, or report problems or complaints about the study, contact the UW Human Subjects Division.

Study Team	Kenneth St. Pierre 785 393 0998
UW Human Subjects Division	206.543.0098 hsdinfo@uw.edu

Consent presenter statement

By printing my name on this form, I am attesting that I have provided the participant with information about this study. The participant has been given sufficient time to consider participation, and I have answered any questions they had. The participant indicated that they understand the nature of the study, including the risks and benefits of participating.

Printed name of study staff obtaining consent

Date

Participant’s statement

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have been informed about the study and I voluntarily agree to participate in the research. I have had a chance to ask questions. Suppose I have questions later about the study or feel that I have been harmed by participating in it. In that case, I can contact a member of the research team or the UW Human Subjects Division using the information listed above. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of legally authorized representative (LAR)

Signature of LAR

Relationship of LAR to participant

Date

Appendix D

IRB Approval



DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

March 9, 2026

Dear Kenneth James St. Pierre:

On 3/9/2026, the University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) reviewed the following application:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	From Past to Present: Reclaiming Indigenous Education Through Relationship, Sovereignty, and Systemic Change in Kansas
Investigator:	Kenneth James St. Pierre
IRB ID:	STUDY00024833
Funding:	None

Exempt Status

HSD determined that your proposed activity is human subjects research that qualifies for exempt status (Category 2). This determination may or may not be based on the Limited IRB Review process.

- This determination is valid for the duration of your research.
- This means that your research is exempt from the federal human subjects regulations, including the requirement for IRB approval and continuing review.
- **Depending on the nature of your study, you may need to obtain other approvals or permissions to conduct your research. For example, you might need to apply for access to data or specimens (e.g., to obtain UW student data). Or you might need to obtain permission from facilities managers to approach possible subjects or conduct research procedures in the facilities (e.g., Seattle School District; the Harborview Emergency Department).**

Only certain types of changes to exempt research require that you submit a modification in Zipline. For information about what changes require a Modification, refer to the guidance on [Exempt Research](#). If you are unsure if your proposed changes require a modification, contact your [HSD team](#) before preparing the modification.

HSD does not review or approve consent plans and consent materials for exempt research. Researchers are still responsible for providing subjects with information about the research prior to their agreement to participate. Refer to the guidance on [Exempt Research](#) for details about what information should be provided. You may wish to use the optional [Exempt Consent Template](#) as a guide.

Thank you for your commitment to ethical and responsible research. We wish you great success!

Appendix E

Interview Guided Questions

Round 1: Awareness & Understanding

1. What does it mean to you as an educator, the Essential Understanding that Indigenous Nations and Peoples in Kansas continue to thrive?
2. Before reading this framework, how would you describe your understanding of the Tribal Nations with historical or current ties to Kansas? Has your perspective changed?
3. Which of the nine subtopics (e.g., sovereignty, Indigenous languages, health/foodways) feels most relevant or unfamiliar to your teaching practice, and why?

Round 2: Implementation & Experience

0. Have you incorporated any aspect of this framework into your classroom, curriculum, or school activities? If so, how? If not, what barriers exist?
0. What kinds of professional development or resources do you believe are necessary to support educators in implementing this framework in a meaningful and respectful way?
0. Can you describe any partnerships or relationships your school has with local Tribal Nations or Indigenous families? How do these relationships influence teaching and learning?
0. How do your students—especially Indigenous students—respond when Indigenous history, identity, or sovereignty is centered in the classroom?

Round 3: Systems & Visioning

0. What systemic barriers (district, state policy, curriculum mandates, etc.) do you see as limiting the full implementation of this framework in Kansas schools?
0. In your opinion, what would it take to move Kansas from simply acknowledging Tribal Nations to fully co-creating education systems with them?
0. What is your vision for Indigenous education in Kansas over the next 5–10 years, and how do you see yourself contributing to that future?

Appendix F

Thank You Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

Wóphida thánka – I offer you my deepest thanks.

I want to extend my sincere gratitude for your time, wisdom, and willingness to participate in my dissertation research focused on transforming Indian education in Kansas. Your voice, your story, and your insights have not only informed this work they have given it life, spirit, and purpose.

As an Indigenous educator and relative, I entered this research with the belief that meaningful change must come from the people most connected to our youth and our communities. Your contributions affirmed that belief. Whether you shared your experiences as an educator, administrator, advocate, or community member, you reminded me that we carry a responsibility not just to critique the system, but to reimagine it in ways that honor our ancestors and lift up future generations.

Throughout this process, I have been guided by the principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. I carry your words with great care and intend to ensure that they are reflected with integrity in my work. This dissertation is not just an academic requirement, it is a continuation of our collective journey toward educational sovereignty, justice, and healing.

Thank you again for standing with me in this work. Your participation is a powerful act of resistance, resilience, and relationship-building. I look forward to sharing the results of this research with you and continuing this important dialogue in ways that serve our students, our communities, and our Nations.

Very Respectful,

Kenneth St. Pierre

Enrolled citizen of the Ihanktonwan Nation

Dissertation in Practice Candidate

University of Washington- Tacoma & Muckleshoot Tribal College

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