STORIES OF EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS:
INDIGENOUS LEARNING & SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH
IN
EDUCATION

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Abstract

Rose is a 5th grade indigenous child riding a school bus to school, which is a 90 minute round trip. She is tired and hungry because she awoke before dawn and has not eaten any breakfast. She is afraid and not very enthusiastic about going into a hostile environment at public school. Will Rose continue to go to school and be one of half to graduate from her reservation or will she drop out? How will she make her own way? How will America address the low academic level of indigenous students when compared to all other diverse groups? This narrative qualitative study will research the perceptions of indigenous students who are transposed into a non-indigenous educational environment.

The theoretical framework-guiding lens in this study is Vygotsky’s developmental socio-cultural theory. This theory, according to Miller (2007), will help in the understanding of cultural contributions to development in today’s global society. The research design will involve interviews of a purposeful sample composed of three indigenous adults between the ages of 30 and 46. This age group was selected based on the age in which identity formation takes place. It is a time when adults have matured enough to be able to reflect back on their past, have more awareness of their identity, and how their experiences played a role in their identity development. The research will have implications for educators who want to make a difference in Indigenous students’ learning, achievement, and persistence in staying in school and ultimately to high school graduation.

*Keywords:* Indigenous learning, Vygotsky’s Socio-Cultural Theory, Culturally Responsive Curriculum.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“That education should be regulated by law and should be a affair of state is not to be denied, but what should be the character of this public education, and how young persons should be educated, are questions which remain to be considered” (Aristotle, trans. 1941)

Problem Statement

Castagno & Brayboy (2008) state that the academic performance of indigenous students is low when compared to other students. The school pedagogy or curriculum may not be matching up to the needs of these students. Castagno & Brayboy (2008), suggest that this mismatch of culture contributes to achievement gaps. In this study, indigenous will refer to Native Americans in the United States.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word indigenous as “Born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to (the soil, region, etc.). (Used primarily of aboriginal inhabitants or natural products).” The International Labour Organisation (1989) notes indigenous people as the following:

(a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural, and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.

(b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.
Holm, Pearson & Chavis (2003) expand that indigenous ceremonial cycles are linked to language, sacred history and to a particular environment.

Indigenous in this study will refer to tribal people who are naturally born to a country, who are distinguished from the dominant community by their own culture, ceremonies, language, identity, and history through storytelling. This definition helps to reflect a more non-Western perspective to the definition of indigenous.

Indigenous education will mean, according to May & Aikman (2003), a program of preserving and maintaining indigenous culture, language, and identity through different pedagogical approaches.

Castagno & Brayboy (2008) note that the number of diverse students is increasing and schools are clearly not meeting the needs of indigenous students. If the culture of the students is ignored, they may become disengaged and will not be motivated to learn leading to loss of identity, poor self-esteem, which may lead to poor achievement, lower retention rates, higher absenteeism, and an increase in the school drop-out rates (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Kozulin (2003) states that a main goal of learning is passing culture on to each generation, but the majority of educators are not aware of this until a multicultural classroom challenges them. The culture of diverse students is one need that is important. Teachers will have to address the cultural needs of these students if they are to be successful academically.

Significance

The first practical goal is to develop pedagogical approaches that are based on Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of learning and indigenous educational philosophies. The second practical goal is to develop a culturally responsive curriculum that is culturally sensitive to diverse students, in particular to the needs of indigenous learners. As a result of these new strategies,
students may learn to observe and solve problems in new ways. This in turn will help improve academic achievement and develop new critical thinking skills, which are needed to compete in a multicultural society.

Demmert (2001) suggests there is evidence that involving students in educational cultural programs may lead to an improvement in academic performance, school attendance rates, and behavior. Hilberg & Tharp (2002) state there is some literature suggesting that successful teaching strategies using cultural learning may improve the achievement level of all students. The literature supports the use of social culture within the curriculum with teachers adapting lessons that fill the needs of the student’s socio-cultural environment to improve student behavior and engagement. “This educational approach requires a shift in teaching methods, curricular materials, teacher dispositions, and school–community relations” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 942).

The literature also supports the idea that congruency between the school environment and the culture of the community may lead indigenous to be empowered, resulting in an improvement of academic achievement and social responsiveness towards their school and community. “Congruency between the school environment and the language and culture of the community is critical to the success of formal learning” (Demmert, 2001, p. 9). Cleary and Peacock (1998) also mention the building of trust, connections with the community, activity based learning along with cooperative learning and a culturally relevant curriculum. According to Castagno and Brayboy (2008), when students and the community are involved in selecting subject matter and developing the curriculum the result will be the achievement of a cultural responsive curriculum, which is built upon students’ cultural prior knowledge.
The problem of practice that this study addresses is the lack of attention, research, and knowledge around indigenous student needs and the consequent achievement gap. The research question that guides this research is: What is the experience of indigenous students who are transposed into a non-indigenous educational environment?

Sub questions are as follows: How do indigenous students perceive their learning experience? Do they perceive the school environment to meet their needs? How or how not? Why or why not? In what ways is the curriculum culturally responsive or not, based on the participants’ perception? What are the challenges that indigenous students face?

**Purpose of this Study and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experience indigenous student learning in non-indigenous schools. This qualitative narrative study will use Vygotsky’s social-cultural developmental theory in the investigation of the following question:

What is the experience of indigenous students who are transposed into a non-indigenous educational environment?

This study will reveal the stories of the educational experiences of three indigenous adults who attended non-indigenous schools. These stories will illustrate educational experiences through childhood memories along with the effects of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. These stories could be useful in providing feedback for learning, improvement, and guidance during the implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum for practitioners.

Castagno & Brayboy (2008) state that a culturally responsive curriculum is important in order to connect both tribal communities and the dominant culture to prepare indigenous students academically and to be active members of their communities.

Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory (1978) will provide a framework for understanding
learning and cognitive development within a child’s culture.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that will be used as a lens in the study of the problem will be Vygotsky’s developmental socio-cultural theory. “The relationship between child socialization and cognitive achievement of indigenous students in non-indigenous schools has been largely ignored until recently” (Fuller & Clark, 1994, p. 120). One of the theories that address this link is the socio-cultural theory, which discusses the relationships, human cognitive achievement, and diversity of development, culture, and learning through the interactions of adults or peers.

“Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). This theory will provide the framework and foundation for this research, along with the literature on indigenous education.

In the developmental socio-cultural theory, Vygotsky (1978) uses the zone of proximal development as a diagnostic principle, which “allows us to penetrate the process itself of mental development” (p. 203). Through the zone of proximal development, we can study mental maturation in the proximal and the following periods in the stages of development” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 203).

Miller (2007) believes this approach to education will provide an analysis of learning and how this relates to the child’s routine within her/his cultural environment and subsequent cognitive development. The investigation of how students learn and the developmental socio-cultural approach to learning may provide insight into the diverse cultural needs of indigenous students, and this understanding may result in better student achievement.
The socio-cultural developmental theory discusses culture and learning and the relationship to one another. It looks at the purpose of learning and how culture is passed on to each generation. Vygotsky (1978) believed in the development and the influence of society in which, “He felt that what children can do with the assistance of others (the zone of proximal development) is a better reflection of their intellectual ability than what they can do alone.” (Miller, 2007, p. 183). Vygosky believed that there was a relationship between development and learning. “Education is only useful when it moves ahead of development” (Vygosky, 1997, p. 212). Miller (2007) notes Vygotsky focused on cognitive goals that are shared between the child and the environment resulting in the child shaping the environment.

Scholars discuss culturally diverse students interacting with people in the environment and the use of psychological tools in the learning process. Vygotsky believed that diverse children used different psychological tools in cognitive learning as instruments of internalizing information. “…every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and later on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological), and then inside the child (intra-psychological)” (Vygotsky, 1978. p. 57). According to Alex Kozulin (2003), the Vygotskian point of view of cognitive education is in providing these students with new psychological tools that can shape general or more specific cognitive functions. Indigenous cultural tools could achieve this along with the new psychological tools suggested by Vygotsky.

Kozulin (2003) explains human and symbolic mediation psychological tools and how Vygotsky believes that symbolic tools build upon the human mediator tool in cognitive development. “Humans master themselves from the outside through psychological tools” (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 141). The exploration of these psychological tools used in the socio-cultural theory will help to reveal how learning takes place between the culturally diverse student, such
as the indigenous learner, and the educational environment. Kozulin (2003) states, Vygotsy emphasized the use of symbolic mediation tools by children in the context of socio-cultural activities particularly formal education environment.

According to Kozulin (1998), Vygotsky believed that learning and cognitive development resulted from the diverse child using symbolic mediators such as different mathematical symbols, writing, and graphic organizers in the formal environment. Teachers, as human mediators, may help diverse students make sense these tools and symbols through the use of culturally responsive activities. Teacher-student relationships and new psychological tools will help children with diverse needs process learning resulting in an improvement of their achievement. The following section discusses the literature and making particular subjects more culturally responsive to improve student performance.

An example of a culturally responsive curriculum is ethno mathematics. According to Eglash (1997), ethno mathematics is the understanding of the relationship between culture and mathematics. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) note that in ethno mathematics teachers must identify culturally everyday knowledge. Taylor, Stevens, Peregyo, & Bath (1991) state that activities could also include “tessellations” using the arts for creativity and geometric patterns. Students on the virtual bead loom may learn the Cartesian coordinate plane in mathematics. According to Eglash (2003), the bead loom is based on “four-fold symmetry”, which means the same shape is reflected in both directions. Gilliland (1995) notes a culturally relevant science curriculum may include the study of nature, the ways of animals, and the growing of plants through field trips and observing nature. Still other subjects such as social studies and language arts may also be made culturally relevant. Social science could include the history of the local culture. Language arts may include stories that are relevant to the students. Castagno and
Brayboy (2008) suggest local stories from the community that are collected from elders and written down by students. As a result, prior knowledge from caring relationships within the culture is utilized in student’s learning through culturally responsive activities.

Miller (2007) notes that Vygotsky’s theory also gives the perspective of the significance of developing caring relationships in learning. “One may say that only through the other do we become ourselves, this rule applies to each psychological function as well as to the personality as a whole” (Vygotsky, 1983, p.144). Wilson (1994) supports relationships in indigenous learning with the “modeling of genuine caring” (p. 312). Dei (2009) discusses indigenous and social, physical, spiritual realities, and cognitive perspectives where there is a sense of caring in the community. The investigation of cognitive development and caring relationships as a learning need of indigenous students within the community could be examined. Identity is shown through the group’s function of educating the young using these cultural tools.

Vygotsky’s perspective to the approach to identity is the understanding of how the socio-cultural process affects identity formation through the use of contextualized and mediated tools in mental functioning during social activity and not in the individual’s choices according to (Penuel & Wersch, 1995). Erikson (1959) notes that the construct of identity is psychosocial in nature, which connects the individual with one’s culture and unique development. Miller (2007) states that this leads us to look at other cultures (other than our own) for understanding cognitive development. Miller further explains that identity within a culture will provide children with the necessary tools such as language and other strategies to function within that culture. In Vygotsky’s view the individual and one’s culture and psychological tools were tied together and not separate or independent from one another. The next section will discuss the connections of cultural tools, such as storytelling, power, and transformational change.
A supportive theoretical lens to be used in this study will be the Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to Writer (2008), the CRT was developed during the ‘70’s to examine the relationships between race, racism, and power. Racism is the manifestation of power to protect and maintain the power of the white privilege (Delgado, 1989, Harris, 1993). CRT includes the dimension of activism to bring about transformational change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT may be a way for indigenous people to express themselves through traditional storytelling to help produce change. Writer (2008) states that CRT provides an access to a “voice” (p. 3) of the indigenous people to explain their perspective or reality through “parables, chronicles, stories, counter stories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories” (p. 3). Tribal Race Theory (TribalCrt) is also studied in the literature to bring about change.

Bryan Brayboy (2005) introduced (TribalCrt) to examine the role of colonization within the processes of society. Writer (2008) states that through the CRT and TribalCrt, the understanding of how the indigenous culture is affected by colonization may help change the educational and societal contexts. CRT and TribalCrt, according to Writer (2008), will help to uncover and confront continuing colonization such as “food, fun, festivals, and foolishness” (p. 1) that exists in multicultural education within educational and societal environments.

There appears to be misunderstandings concerning what it means to be indigenous and how colonization affects the indigenous culture. Writer (2008) notes CRT and TribalCrt may be utilized along with multicultural education (MCE) through critical pedagogy to help in understanding colonization in order to decolonize and obtain indigenous social justice. The literature supports the importance of critical pedagogy in MCE with the teaching of critical analysis and “it links knowledge of diversity and inequality with actions that can make the
culture more socially just” (Oakes & Lipton, 2007, p. 100). There is a significant amount of literature concerning MCE but there are varied definitions of it.

Nieto & Bode (2008) define MCE as school reform that is comprehensive, which challenges and rejects racism along with all other forms of oppression within schools and into society. For school reform to be effective in transforming curriculum through effective instructional strategies, Nieto & Bode (2008) identify seven characteristics of MCE, “basic education, important for all students, pervasive, a process, antiracist education, education for social justice, and critical pedagogy” (p. 4).

A Theory of Culturally Responsive Curriculum in the following figure 1-1 will guide the study in understanding how a culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum may address the needs of indigenous students with a subsequent improvement in learning. This theory will change as evolving themes emerge from the research.
Figure 1-1 Conceptual Framework of a Culturally Responsive Curriculum

**Overview of Methods**

This study is a qualitative narrative inquiry. Data will be obtained through open-ended and one-to-one conversational interviewing, observations, and journaling. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquiry is stories that tell personal and social experiences of the individual. Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2000) support the idea that the researcher analyzes these stories through re-storying for key elements such as the time, plot, and setting. The researcher
will establish a collaborative relationship with the participants due to the importance of relationships in indigenous learning and building of trust in cognitive learning according to Ollerenshaw & Creswell (1978) socio-cultural theory.

According to Meneses (2007), limitations in a study include the internal validity and whether the findings and results are believable. In this narrative inquiry there will be constant collaboration with the participants, through triangulation, to establish trustful relationships and in measuring the validity of the findings. They will be active collaborative participants of the research and they will be asked if the text shows honesty, accuracy, and authenticity in its descriptions of the findings.

**Definition of Terms**

*Culturally responsive education:* recognizes, respects, and uses students’ identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments. Being culturally responsive is more than being respectful, empathetic, or sensitive. “Accompanying actions, such as having high expectations for students and ensuring that these expectations are realized, are what make a difference” (Gay, 2000, p. 3).

*Indigenous:* Refers to, as noted by May & Aikman (2003), “Tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions.”

*Indigenous education:* According to May & Aikman (2003), a program of preserving and maintaining indigenous culture, language, and identity through different pedagogical approaches. An understanding of the needs of indigenous students may include teacher – student
relationships, the use of dialogue, visual and cooperative learning.

*Indigenous education* is defined as:

A relevant, qualitative, and self-determined education. The coherence around the recognition and expression of indigenous peoples’ strong sense of individual and collective identity. The development of individual capabilities and the strengthening of democratic spaces and practices. The reinforcement of indigenous identity and values in contexts of rapid social change (May & Aikman 2003, p. 142).

*Socio-Cultural Theory*: Inspired by Vygotsky to study the child within the cultural context, learning through the zone of proximal development, mental development through socio-cultural origins, and the functioning of the intellect through tools provided by a culture (Miller, 2007).

*Tribal Race Theory (TribalCrt)*: Introduces by Bryan Brayboy (2005) to examine the indigenous culture and is relationship with the United States concerning laws and policies.

*Culturally Responsive Curriculum*:

Ismat (1994) characterizes culturally responsive curriculum as that which (a) capitalizes on students’ cultural backgrounds rather than attempting to override or negate them; (b) is good for all students; (c) is integrated and interdisciplinary; (d) is authentic and child centered, connected to children’s real lives; (e) develops critical thinking skills; (f) incorporates cooperative learning and whole language strategies; (g) is supported by staff development and pre-service preparation; and (h) is part of a coordinated, building-wide strategy. (p. 151).

Demmert & Towner (2003) note that a culturally responsive curriculum connects students’ personal and community experiences.
Summary

This chapter provided an overview of indigenous learning and the theoretical frameworks of developmental Socio-Cultural Theory and Critical Race Theory. This study researches the perception patterns of indigenous students that are transposed into non-indigenous educational environments through a narrative inquiry approach. This research hopes to contribute to the literature on indigenous education to improve educational learning and reduce academic achievement gaps among indigenous students. The following chapter will provide information in the literature review on the construction of knowledge, relationships, motivation in learning, identity, language, interventions, learning styles and pedagogy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historical Connections of Nature, Culture, and Indigenous Learning

John Dewey believed the individual interacts and is reflective with the natural environment or one's culture. As noted by John Dewey (1938/1990), “Since he understands their problems and successes only by seeing what obstacles and what resources they had from nature, the child is interested in field and forest, ocean and mountain, plant and animal” (p.153). Friedrich Froebel and John Dewey both supported using the child’s nature in education. According to Froebel (1967), “In the same way the educator looks for the causes of a child’s activity. His most important consideration must always be the child’s own nature” (p. 110). In The Education of Man, Pestalozzi states that he believed in observing students and developing their abilities (1951). Through observation and getting to know students, an educator can “draw out” students latent curiosities from this native setting or one’s own experiences (Dewey, 1938/1990).

Dewey believed that democracy brings about the growth of the individual through the participation of activities that are formed from one’s experiences. Kovacs (2009) supports that John
Dewey also believed that through democracy there is free critical inquiry that is reflective of interactions with the community. In understanding Dewey, Kovacs (2009) notes we should start with the early Platonic dialogues in which Socrates states in reference to students that we should be "meeting them where they are" (p. 28) such as topics of personal friendship. From this topic one may draw out the student’s views and opinions. Kovacs (2009) states this was the core of Dewey’s understanding of the educational process and its relationship with the experiences, perspectives, attitudes, opinions, and emotions of the child. In indigenous learning Atkinson (2002) describes this:

Educare--the art of learning through healing. The word education comes from the Latin educare--to draw out from, to show the way, to nurture the children, to lead. An educator therefore, must be a person who has walked the path of learning from life experiences, and through the application of knowledge in wise action, draw out from others their own ability to learn from their experiences and those of others ... The art of teaching is to use tools that deepen our learning abilities. We are all students and we are all teachers. Educate is the art of learning in teaching (2003, p. 56).

“We start with the child's life experience not for the purpose of indulging it, but rather to enlarge, enrich, and reconstruct it. Of course, Dewey emphasizes this activity and growth of experience in a democratic community” (Kovacs 2009, p. 28). This type of experience in the democratic sense is very similar to the indigenous autonomous learning philosophies. Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi (2001) explains indigenous autonomous learning philosophies, “... you learn about your culture, your values and beliefs from everything you do and everything around you ...Yapa culture is reflected in how Yapa live and what they do and their responsibilities and relationships...” (p. 23).

Mundy, Bickmore, Hayhoe, Madden, & Madjidi (2008) believe that autonomous indigenous learning involves the whole individual observing, listening, and independently absorbing information. This theme of the whole individual or “holistic learning” is also present in the work of Professor Judy Atkinson in which she defines this as a process of 'whole of self',
'whole of life' continual healing, “... process of learning about the self at deep levels” (Atkinson, 2002, p. x). There is a respect for the individual’s right to learn holistically without interference.

Indigenous learning is about holistic learning from nature, relationships and the community. Indigenous cultures live close to their environment. The natural world is their guide including the sun, the moon and mother earth. There is processing of knowledge through cultural background experiences from nature, which are similar to John Dewey’s ideas concerning learning and the student’s natural environment that includes one’s culture and perspectives.

The reading of the literature pertaining to Vygotsky’s social-cultural theory and indigenous learning will provide guidance in the retrieval of information in this investigation. Students' needs are changing and becoming more diverse. The focus of this paper will be on indigenous learning, socio-cultural theory, and the needs of indigenous students.

**Relationships**

The first theme concerns the socio-cultural theory in education and how it can address the needs of students, particularly indigenous students. Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory emphasizes the significance of developing relationships in learning with a “sense of trust in others” (Miller 2007, p. 197) resulting in acquired cultural tools. Kozulin (2003) notes that for Vygotsky the development of the child comes about by the relationships with peers and adults. This development in indigenous learning could be due to the child interacting and observing the parent or adult with a focus on a common goal. A common theme discussed in indigenous literature as Pueblo educator and scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) explains, “Indigenous education is, in its truest form, is about learning relationships in context” (p.83) and is the interaction of the individual within the family and the community. The literature suggests interactions and relationships are important in indigenous learning as the individual makes her/his life-long
journey of responsible learning.

Raider-Roth (2005) notes trustworthy relationships in school are the “bedrock of learning” (p. 19). A trustworthy and mentoring relationship is valued in indigenous learning. Lambe (2003) notes that teaching and learning begins with the relationship of a mentor and the individual in indigenous learning in which the individual reflects freely upon the suggestions made by the mentor. Indigenous learners may acquire skills and internalize them by interacting with their mentors through dialogue within their environment.

Dialogue

Paulo Freire’s (1990) educational philosophy of education regarding dialogue, experience, culture, and relationships has been written as a comparison to indigenous or local knowledge. Freire asserted, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1990), “The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (p. 85). He believed that students and teachers should work and learn together. But he realized the imbalance of power between teacher knowledge and student knowledge and experiences. Freire suggested teachers use dialogue to interact with students and their environment to help with this imbalance. This dialogue could produce learning for both teacher and student.

Elsewhere in supporting literature, this interaction is seen as an opportunity for innovation and creative dialogue (Ball, 2004; Bala & Joseph, 2007), and a harnessing of two systems in order to create new knowledge (Durie, 2005). This new knowledge curriculum would be the interacting of people together with the world around them. Freire suggested that student knowledge was based on their experiences. “Educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their own reality as a basis of literacy.
This includes, obviously, the language they bring to the classroom” (Freire, 1990, p. 151).

Bartlett (2005) supports the use of language in the classroom in her article from which she draws on ethnographic fieldwork of adult education nongovernmental organizations in Brazil. It pays attention to three questions that are complicated and continue to trouble educators everywhere. Why is it important to understand the meaning of dialogue? How to transform the student-teacher relationships? How to incorporate the use of local knowledge into the classroom? This study shows how Brazilian adult educators understood and implemented the Freirean pedagogical theory. The pedagogy is one of friendship, love, and caring teacher-relationships through the use of language and dialogue.

The literature shows Vygotsky’s (1978) beliefs concerning internalization with the use of dialogue, and how it is an important psychological tool. According to Miller (2008), through conversation children may learn to internalize concepts “when thinking through a problem; an external dialogue becomes an internal dialogue” (p. 178). Miller (2007), states that children from different cultures use language to construct meaning to solve problems and make sense of their relationship within the world.

Tharp & Yamauchi (1994) discuss different cultures and how they vary in their language and instructional conversations. They describe instructional conversations as dialogues between teacher and student that build new knowledge with prior knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) supports this with the potential of the child and the zone of proximal development in which skills that have not matured and skills that are in the process of maturing. He discusses the preparation and potential of a child. “The actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal developmental characterizes mental development prospectively” (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86-87). Kozulin (2003) states Vygotsky believed that the
human mediator tool provided the psychological function for development to occur first in the interaction with people and then secondly in its internalization. The literature shows “one of the central concerns of the socio-cultural activities studies inspired by Vygotsky” (Kozulin, 2003, p. 19) was concerning how interactions develop between an adult and child resulting in the internalization by the child in cognitive development. Miller (2007) also supports this in the socio-cultural theory in which Vygotsky believed in the zone of proximal development and how children learn, internalize, and develop their potential while problem solving under the guidance of an adult. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development examines the ongoing process of sharing new knowledge and building upon prior knowledge through relationships within the community through the use of cultural tools.

Marcelle Townsend-Cross (2004) notes that indigenous learning is an ongoing process of absorption, experience and the sharing of knowledge through cultural tools. She also discusses the potential of the child and building on prior knowledge and how through the utilization of the family and the community, rich oral history may be handed down from generation to generation in the cultural ritual tool of storytelling.

The literature reveals indigenous learning in various cultures value and use different tools for learning. Miller (2007) states different cultures emphasize these various tools such as verbal or nonverbal skills. Miller (2007) also supports that children learn different cultural tools, which are skills that are valued by their culture such as, “weaving, hunting, sorcery, healing, reading, taking a bus, or operating computers by observing others and responding to their informal instruction” (p. 175). He discusses children modeling behavior through the observation of their parents and peers. Understandings may be seen, as believed by Miller (2007), in how children use culture’s tools to help them think, transform, and shape their minds. Indigenous learning may
bring about new ways of thinking of how the child learns through these cultural tools by
interacting with experiences in nature, family, and the community. Dei (2009) discusses
indigenous socio-cultural activities, physical, spiritual realities, and cognitive perspectives. He
notes there is a sense of belonging to the community and identity is shown through the group’s
function of educating the young using cultural tools. Miller (2007) expresses that children and
adults from some cultures will engage in daily living that will use the valued skills of
observations and sensitivity to other’s characteristics. As a result of these tools, the adult could
be preparing and developing identity and the learning potential of the child to be successful
within the culture.

Identity

Erikson’s (1959) theory of identity complements Freud’s work on psychoanalytic
psychology pertaining to ego identity and “the organization of experience by ego synthesis”
(p. 48). Erikson (1959) describes identity as changing and is an “evolving configuration” (p.71)
of syntheses and re-synthesis throughout childhood with a final assembly of identity elements at
the end of childhood. Adolescence at the end of childhood should, according to Erikson (1959),
reveal a new kind of identification through sociability and in “competitive apprenticeship” (p.
66) among one’s peers. Grome & Edwardson (1996) and Grotevan, (1987) support that self-
identity is not static but is dynamic because personal characteristics and the context, such as
school, are always changing. According to Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, &
Gunstone (2000), self-identity is developed through interactions with culture/society, family,
peers and school/work environments and the interpretations of those interactions. Rapaport
(1954) supports that Erikson’s theory of identity concentrates on the role of social reality, “each
society meets each phase of the development of its members by institutions (parental care,
schools, teachers, occupations, etc.) to ensure the developing individual will be viable in it” (p.15).

According to Purdie et al. (2000) the construct of self-identity is complicated and it involves self-conception, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-regulation, and responsibility. Erikson (1959) expands upon this with the child comparing and modeling to measure oneself in order to seek happiness resulting in self-esteem. Self-identity and self-esteem for the American Indian is connected to values of social responsibility that includes psychological relevancy to feelings of harmony, balance and wholeness (Cross, 1998).

The literature shows links with self-identity and interactions with one’s background and values. Erikson (1959) states that identity may link an individual with certain unique values that are tied with the history or sameness of her/his people. Purdie et al. (2000) supports that a sense of history, kinship, language, and traditional practices are important for indigenous people in terms of identity. Relationships between social organizations and its effects upon the family are explored in the literature. Freud (1938) notes that the social class standards of groups may have an effect upon the characteristics and traditions of a race upon its offspring.

The literature shows relationships between social lives in groups or group identity and one’s individual beginnings or ego identity. For example, Erikson (1959) states that group identity such as the re-education of the American Indian rested upon the powerful psychological reality of historical beginnings. Erikson (1959) notes that the passive resistance of the conquered Sioux Indian was guided by a life plan, which failed to reintegrate the identity remnants of the past and restoration dreams where the future would lead them back to the past. Individual perspectives and experiences may play a role in interpretations in this situation. Erikson (1959) notes that individual or personal identity is socially constructed and is dependent upon how
society recognizes the individual and how the individual recognizes that society, which the individual may reject. The following section discusses the role of personal identity, social identity and indigenous youth interpretations.

Meneses (2007) explains social identity as being acquired in an organized group or category (such as race, gender, or ethnicity). Social identity, according to Tajfel & Turner (1986), involves a group membership involvement. This is important in studies of indigenous students learning in a non-indigenous environment. Meneses (2007) states that social identity and personal identity are important because together they comprise an individual’s self-worth and the incongruity that often arises between how others see, label, and the perception of oneself. Positive self-identity is a factor in the perception of oneself. There are research studies in the literature concerning positive self-identity but it is limited in indigenous positive self-identity.

Purdie et al. (2000) state that positive self-identity is one of the factors that contribute to positive school outcomes for indigenous students. There is some evidence in the research that self-identity for indigenous students may be influenced by the situation. Purdie et al. (2000) notes that an indigenous person’s identity may be positive when around other indigenous people, but could be negative when in a majority non-indigenous classroom. Pedersen (1994) describes positive self-identity or self-esteem as how good a person thinks she/he is. The literature reveals factors that influence positive or negative identity as Purdie et al. (2000) note the most important factor that influences positive self-identity for indigenous students is the culture, attitude and behavior of significant others such as parents/caretakers, teachers, principals, and peers. The following section will explore the literature for the relationships between identity and language in learning for indigenous students.
**Identity and Language.** Paige (1993) describes language as a way in which members’ identity with a culture, communicates, share meaning, and is also a way to enter into a culture. Culture identification is very important for the American Indian (Horse, 2001; Pewewardy, 2002). Markstrom (2010) note that cultural identity for the American Indian include identifying with a tribe, the connection between the tribe, ancestors, and land, and culture/spirituality, which includes language, history, world view, values, and beliefs. Relationships between identity and memories are studied in the literature. According to Wang (2001, 2004), the onset of memory and the formation of identity are influenced by cultural self-construal. Erikson (1980) notes the ways children receive memories and develop self-identity are through the shaping of the concept of self and the nature of their culture. Markstrom (2010) states that ethnic identity is the cultural domain of identity. Eidse & Sichel (2004) note language is a cultural landmark that is portable in nature. Meneses (2007) supports that it is the connection of common understanding in which speakers share through values, expression of ideas, and stories, that contribute to identity formation. McCarty, Romero-Little, & Warhol (2009) expand upon this by noting there is growing evidence that “Indigenous/heritage-language education” (p. 303) increases children’s learning of indigenous language while at the same time produces positive ethnic identities and high academic achievement levels. But relevancy of indigenous language is a factor among today’s teenagers. According to Lee (2007), a shift is needed from negative peer pressure to a positive one for today’s youth to use their heritage language relating to issues of relevancy in their daily lives due to influences from Western contact.

Charles (2009) states that Western contact along with religion, schooling, especially residential schools have contributed to the struggle in finding an identity for many of the indigenous youth in the United States, Canada, and rural Alaska where indigenous heritage
languages are still spoken. Lomawaima (1994) notes it is often the descendants of the residential schools who suffer the most from the loss of language and identity. Western contact has also influenced increasing gaps between indigenous youth and their elders, which according to Charles (2009), there is a growing distance of the heritage language and the youth by separating them from those who speak the heritage language for the pursuit of a “better life” (p. 365).

Solutions such as “diplomatic agents for change” (Charles, 2009, p. 365) are discussed in the literature as the challenge for the Elders to find ways for those who have the language can act as change agents if a language revolution becomes evident. Power as a factor in cultural and linguistic identity formation for indigenous youth will be reviewed in the following section.

Cervatiuc (2009) notes that cultural and linguistic identity appear to be self-constructed and negotiation from the” direct outcome of human agency” (p. 266) rather than attained from the outside or society. Relationships of power and cultural linguistic identity are studied in the literature. Research based on Norton (2000b), Bourdieu (1991), & West (1992) state that the concept of power cannot be separated from the construct of identity. The discussion of power and the involvement of internal and external power are broken down in the literature further. Norton (2000b) explains that external power is socially constructed among individuals, institutions, and communities. He further defines internal power as relationships within individuals that emerge from awareness and appreciation of attributes and self-worth in individuals as they view themselves as human beings within their environment. Findings from the research study according to Cervatiuc (2009), focuses on internal power that may lead to more external power, which leads to increased feelings of worthiness, sense of equality, and the building of confidence in the evolving formation of positive identity. Effects of globalization on identity formation will be discussed in the next section.
Identity Formation and Globalization in Indigenous Populations. Research in the literature is limited concerning the effects of globalization upon identity formation for American Indian adolescences. According to Markstrom (2010), one risk of globalization is that American Indian adolescents receive confusing messages from the media that may weaken identity formation within their local cultures. Traditional values and practices are at risk and Markstrom (2010) notes that “longstanding colonial actions” (p. 523) undermine traditional values and practices with relentless pressure to assimilate those of the broader society. The following section discusses homogenization and social ambiguity that the American Indian adolescent experiences regarding their own culture.

Homogenization is described in the literature as an outcome of globalization due to global influences leading to social ambiguity with stress associated with conflicts in cultural worldviews and values. Arnet, (2001; Edgecombe (2004); Harter & Monsour (1992) caution when students have one foot in each culture, they are trying to regulate different aspects of the self and psychological tensions may accentuate due to conflicts in behaviors and emotions of their total self. Purdie et al. (2000) support that positive self-identity is more readily attainable when indigenous students can successfully integrate various parts of themselves without dealing with excessive contradictions of emotions and behaviors resulting in a commitment to school and successful achievement. A negative outcome of globalization may be “identity diffusion” (p. 78) and Erikson (1959) notes this may come about due to the inability (temporary or final) of the ego to establish an identity leading to reservations in commitment situations within ones’ culture.

Cultural learning needs can be a factor in the motivation of indigenous students within a curriculum. Indigenous students are expected to learn from a traditional dominant educational pedagogy and curriculum, but they may not be engaged. This could be, according to Stasha L.
Green (2007), “…due to the lack of curriculum and instruction that reflects persons, experiences, and frames of reference that are relevant or reflective of their race/ethnicity and/or cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (p.12). Cultural relevance of curriculum topics, student interest and motivation may be factors to be examined when looking at the diverse needs of indigenous students.

**Motivation in Learning**

Castagno & Brayboy (2008) contend for schooling to be effective and culturally responsive, it must be connected to student lives through engagement and collaboration. Greene (2007) supports that cultural relevance of topics could affect students’ motivation and engagement. He explains that subjects become interesting to students when they can relate to actual cultural experiences. Greene (2007) also notes relevant instruction and curriculum in a culture of excellence as effective learning strategies may increase the attention levels of students.

The National Science Board (2010) recommends a community of parents/guardians, teachers, peers, and students to create a culture of excellence that encourages creativity that rewards excellence of all students regardless of “race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or geographical locale” (p. 3). Teachers need ways to address motivation and cognitive engagement in student learning and they may need help in meeting these challenges. Raju & Clayson (2010) support the need for teacher-to-teacher communication, connections, and collaborations to help teachers accomplish this. Teachers can work together across the curriculum as well with students and parents to creative a culture of excellence and collaboration. Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle (1993) note that real situations, collaboration, and technology may bring about interactive learning and increase students’ motivation. Blumeneld, Kempler, & Krajcik (2006) support that authenticity,
collaboration, inquiry, and technology can cause students to think deeply resulting in motivating them for cognitive engagement.

In the developmental socio-cultural theory, Vygotsky (1998) uses the zone of proximal development as a diagnostic principle in mental cognitive development, maturation, and motivation that must be realized in the prior and subsequent periods of development.

**Motivation and Prior Knowledge.** Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle (1993) support the discussion of prior knowledge and how conceptual change cannot go beyond student’s zone of proximal development or students will "assimilate" and not "accommodate" conceptual change. Mastascusa, Snyder, and Hoyt (2011) also note that “assimilation” (p. 54) may also lead to students using new knowledge to build upon incorrect “schemata” (p. 54), where in “accommodation” (p. 54) students incorporate new knowledge to generate new schemata to be processed and integrated with material already in their long term memory. A need for the equilibrium of new and prior knowledge without much conflict is also studied in the literature. Song, Hannifin, & Hill (2006) state sufficient prior cultural knowledge is needed for students to engage in activities or they may lack motivation to invest any needed effort.

There is discussion in the literature on how motivation may be affected if students cannot make the connections between prior cultural knowledge and present knowledge. Song et al. (2006) support if students are not able to make relevant connections to new information and existing knowledge within their cultural backgrounds, they might avoid any involvement in activities. Pintrich et al. (1993) state that if students believe they can perform a task and it is relevant to them, they may continue and persist in a task resulting in the use of problem solving and cognitive learning.
There is a need to make the connections between student cultures and the culture of schools through curriculum and instruction in order for them to see the relevancy and connections to their own lives. How to make the connections between student cultures and the culture of schools through curriculum and instruction could be explored. Also, the challenges that educators face in motivating and academically engaging these students may be examined. Investigation of the literature on the preparation and continuing education of teachers to learn about individual differences in students may be conducted. A thorough review of the literature will provide the foundation and importance of this proposed study.

In a culturally diverse population, the needs and the learning processes in a classroom are equally diverse, and unless those needs are addressed, students could become disengaged and not motivated to learn. Teachers will have to address the cultural needs of diverse students if they are to be successful academically. There may be a need to change to teaching strategies in the traditional educational system that are culturally aligned with the student’s social community.

There is a need for a culturally responsive curriculum that respects students’ cultures and the perspectives that they bring with them from their backgrounds. Connelly (2008) states the curriculum “is a living breathing organism” (p. 169) and the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1998) supports it is grounded in the past, but will adapt and continue to grow in the future. According to the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1998), there is a need for this type of curriculum to respect cultural knowledge of the students, which includes the local language as the basis of a curriculum that complements diverse knowledge systems in a global context.

A culturally responsive curriculum that includes students’ culturally responsive experiences could be one way to address the motivational needs of indigenous students. Teachers will need to make sense of these experiences and change from being “vulnerable observers” of
the curriculum to teach according to different “theoretical orientations and perspectives” (Connelly, 2008, p. 70). Figure 2 shows how culturally effective teaching strategies may improve student achievement.

Figure 2-2 Culturally effective teaching strategies that may improve student achievement.


The target outcome is for students to have equal right to a culturally responsive curriculum of quality that supports and is aligned to their individual perspectives and cultural backgrounds. This culturally responsive curriculum will also be democratic and developmental for all students regardless of their culture or socioeconomic background, but especially for indigenous students because of their particular needs. According to Kelly (2009), the developmental model of curriculum planning should include the principles of human development especially social development. Kelly (2009) states the developmental model of curriculum stresses moral, social development and it “embraces “the whole spectrum of affect development” and cannot be seen as just “cognitive and intellectual growth (p. 102). This may
be interpreted as the many sides of human experience. Elliot Eisner (1985) claims that schooling in Western cultures ignores the affect developmental experience. This indicates a need for strategies that allow students to work independently and setting their own pace, which may increase their self-esteem, motivation, and inspire them to take control and become autonomous in their own learning. A developmental curriculum could also include the principle of democracy, which will result in the independence and empowerment of the autonomous student involved in her/his own learning. This quality culturally responsive curriculum will respect the student’s intellect and culture and may provide students with respect and appreciation for multicultural perspectives and different cultures. The following shows an example of narrative formative assessments as one strategy to achieve this respect of different cultures.

Fowler & Poetter (2004) describe the French culture and their mathematical curriculum. success in the utilization of formative assessments through the use of a “notebook” (p. 305) as a narrative of a student’s school record. The notebook could be a cultural communication device of connecting students, teachers, and parents to the curriculum. Marcelle Townsend-Cross (2004) writes about communication and the connections between the individual, family, and the community, “The child is nurtured to progress from self-centeredness toward an increasing sense of relatedness to family, community and environmental resonance” (para.17). The literature describes constructivism in the school setting and the connections between learning, the individual student and real world situations. Fowler & Poetter (2004) note the importance of connecting multicultural perspectives within the classroom and learning material to the lives of the students if the material is to be learned with a lasting effect.

According to Klug & Whitfield (2003), educators need multicultural perspectives to help them understand the needs of diverse students in reaching their full potential. Klug & Whitfield
(2003) also note for teachers to become multicultural, they will have to examine their own prejudices and alter their perceptions of culture and become involved by interacting with people in the community environment. This will provide teachers with new knowledge about students’ backgrounds resulting in the reshaping of their own identities from multiple perspectives. Connelly (2008) supports, “we teach who we are” (p. 315). Teachers will become multicultural and this will be evident in their teaching. Dewey (1938) believed, according to Connelly (2008), that experience along with curriculum is past, present, and future, which occurs in personal and cultural relationships and is constantly changing. As a result, the curriculum may be seen as moving with perceptions and experiences of the teachers and students. How these perception and experiences are interpreted and related through dialogue and language in student teacher relationships could affect the learning environment.

Dialogue and language could be factors that affect learning in the classroom. Connelly (2008) states the curriculum could be organized around local language and social environment and using student prior knowledge (bilingualism) as improving the school experience. Building on prior knowledge such as native language may also result in improving student identity. Marcelle Townsend-Cross (2004) discusses the potential of the child and building on prior knowledge and how through the utilization of the family and the community, rich oral history may be handed down from generation to generation in the cultural ritual tool of storytelling. The cognitive perspective is demonstrated in the storytelling from generation to generation. Connelly (2008) states that students will be able to construct knowledge for themselves as opposed to learning by facts being given to them. Storytelling will help students in the construction of thoughts, problem solving, and the formulation of mental constructs, which will help towards the development of the knowledge and skills they will learn in school. Storytelling may also be
utilized in other subjects, such as history, to make them more culturally responsive.

The literature suggests that subjects with independent research could be incorporated using indigenous cultural learning tools. The American Friends Service Committee (1989) recommends researching the indigenous Wabanaki culture using the subject of science and investigate topics such as “plant recognition, natural dyeing, maple sap collection, chart showing medicinal plants, animal tracking, plant uses” (p. 82). Researching the Wabanaki culture through the arts and crafts is also recommended with the topics of “weaving, quill and bead necklaces, quillwork, cornhusk dolls, building models (canoes, wigwam, traps, snares, weirs), double-curve designs, and murals depicting some aspect of Wabanaki culture” (p.82). Teachers may become active researchers into students’ cultural backgrounds by working with teachers from other schools. Embracing Dewey’s philosophy of, “imagining researchers working differently in schools and coming to know how teachers make curriculum by working alongside teachers and other practitioners”. (p. 283). In this aspect teachers become curriculum makers, which will be based on their own learning and diverse student experiences.

**Learning Styles & Pedagogy**

Gilliland (1995) notes that the cultural learning style of a student is the way in which she/he will learn most effectively and easily resulting in subsequent higher levels of school achievement. Cleary & Peacock (1998); Hall (1996) support a more holistic approach in learning styles which connects students’ everyday lives to experiential learning, service learning, and hands-on learning, such as interesting field trips. Scholars believe that connecting total student cultural real life experiences and perspectives will be more interesting, appealing and effective for multicultural students. This holistic approach will provide the engagement of diverse students in a culturally responsive curriculum by producing transformational changes through the change
agents of culturally responsive educators, students, and the cultural community. The transformational change may lead to cultural learning styles.

Dewey (1990) advocated, “…development of a spirit of social cooperation and community life” (p.11). Students may be able to use their imaginations with the teacher as a facilitator. The learning style of cooperative learning may be utilized to increase multicultural student engagement, which Gilliland (1995) points out not only does it reduce the competitiveness, it provides an attitude towards students and is “a whole way of life within the classroom” (p. 43). Cooperative learning may require certain values such as cooperation and sharing to be successful. Taylor et al., (1991) note these values and behaviors are a part of many tribal communities and the cooperative learning style appears to improve student achievement among indigenous students. Educators may use cooperative learning pedagogical techniques, which are reflective of community to engage and make learning more interesting for indigenous students. Cleary and Peacock (1998) suggest the building of trust, connections with the community, activity based learning along with cooperative learning within a culturally relevant curriculum. Educators could use educational centers involving cooperative learning pedagogical techniques to create cultural learning environments. Storytelling may incorporate language and culture of the community into the classrooms. Students may relate stories to each other in groups. Students could learn that the learning settings are ways in which school come together as a community.

Butterfield (1994) states, “many American Indian and Alaskan Native students show strengths in visual, perceptual, or spatial information as opposed to information presented verbally and frequently use mental images rather than word associations” (p. 4). A visual learning environment within the classroom is another cultural pedagogical technique that could
be used by teachers. Visual arts may be used across the curriculum along with the use of indigenous cultural tools, which Cleary & Peacock, (1998); Gilliland (1995) note by designing learning activities which involve observation along with using the tools of paper, markers, videos, and chalk. Doering & Veletsianos (2008) describe adventure learning through “GoNorth!” an “online hybrid adventure” (p. 25) where students use technology as a tool to identify, learn about different cultures through media, and make connections to real life experiences. This program could be utilized to help with visual learning among students to make cultural connections and increase motivation and student achievement. The literature discusses indigenous learning in various cultures value and use different tools for learning. Wait time in the classroom could be a different cultural tool for learning.

Time is another pedagogical technique discussed in the literature regarding a culturally responsive curriculum for indigenous students. Scholars such as Gilliland (1995) & Rhodes (1994) believe that teachers should increase the wait time for students to process information to answer the questions. Deyhle & Swisher (1997) note that indigenous students are socialized to wait to speak until they are confident. This confidence may lead to an increase in student participation because students’ take responsibility for their own autonomous learning. Tharp & Yamauchi (1994) support that students are more involved in classrooms when they set their own pace as opposed to the teacher’s pace.

Summary

Chapter 2 has provided the identification of the basis of this inquiry concerning cognitive learning through nature, experiences/perspectives, culture, indigenous educational philosophy, and how learning may come about through oneself. Historical perspectives investigated include the works of Friedrich Froebel, Johann H Pestalozzi, Paulo Freire, and
John Dewey. Connections have been made between child centered learning and a holistic approach to learning in the use of dialogue through relationships. The formation of identity through culture and language is studied in the literature with their subsequent effects on academic achievement for indigenous students. Positive self-identity is one of the factors that contribute to positive school outcomes for indigenous students. Additionally this research could provide an opportunity to consider different ways of engaging and motivating students through global curriculums that are related to student culture.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Methodology

Qualitative narrative inquiry research with a first order interpretive approach will be conducted in this study. Creswell (2007) defines first order narratives as individuals telling their own stories about their experiences. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as a method of understanding experience through the telling and retelling of stories of these experiences through the collaboration of the researcher and participants over a period of time. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) state, “Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told”. (p. 20). The retelling or “re-storying “of the participants’ stories according to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), involves reading transcripts and analyzing the story to understand the participants perceptions or experiences. Creswell (2007) supports narrative inquiry as the need to hear otherwise silenced voices of complex issues that can only be established by talking directly to the participants, who may tell their stories freely through first order narratives. A narrative method will bring the text to life through the participants’ stories. A collaborative narrative will emerge through the collaboration of the researcher and participants throughout the course of the study.
The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry research design is to describe the multiple perspectives and hear the voices of the participants’ perceptions as indigenous students attending non-indigenous schools. Creswell (2007) states that qualitative narrative research design is utilized to allow the participants to be empowered to share their stories, to hear their voices, and to reduce the power relationship that is often present between the researcher and participants. According to Creswell 2007, the researcher may reduce the power relationship by allowing the participants to collaborate with her/him in the data analysis and interpretation phase of the research, which will be done in this study.

Creswell (2007) notes several characteristics of narrative research that will apply to this study:

1. Narrative research is the study of individual experiences. This study will investigate the descriptions of individual experiences of indigenous students that have attended non-indigenous schools.

2. Narrative research is the chronology of the experiences. A collection of stories will be gathered of individual experiences and by using the stages in life there will be the assigning of chronological order and meaning to those experiences.

3. Narrative research is the collection of individual stories. A collection of events will be gathered as the participants tell their stories.

4. Narrative research is the retelling of participants’ stories. The retelling of stories of the participants’ experiences by the researcher in chronological order will have a beginning, middle, and end that may reveal a plot and setting. This could lead to a resolution of any conflicts within the situations involved. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) support that a three-dimensional interaction between the personal and social interaction in chronological order may contain possible solutions between the past, present, and future ideas.
5. Narrative research codes for possible emerging themes. Themes may arise from the context of the participants’ stories that describe their experiences, which could contain more details about the meanings of the stories.

6. Narrative research is about collaborating with the participants. The researcher will actively involve the participants in the research. Together there will be a negotiation of the meaning of the stories between the researcher and the participants that will check the validity of the analysis. Figure 3 shows a Narrative Research Design.
Research Question

The following research question is addressed: What is the experience of indigenous students who are transposed into a non-indigenous educational environment?
Role of the Researcher

The relationship of the researcher and the participants is important in narrative qualitative research. Creswell (2000) notes that it is necessary to have active collaboration with the participants to discuss their stories and at the same time be reflective upon her/his own personal background, which help reshape how the story may be told. Though connections may be found between the researcher and the participants, the researcher’s personal experiences need to be “bracketed in order to view the participants’ particular experiences,” (Meneses, 2007, p. 60).

The literature discusses different issues that may arise in the collecting, analyzing, and the retelling of the participants’ stories. These are issues that the researcher will keep in mind and reflect upon as the study progresses. Pinnegar & Daynes (2006) point out these issues as: Who really owns these stories? Who is the right person to tell these stories? Who has the right to change them? Which versions of the stories are the most convincing? What happens when there is competition among the narratives? What impact do the stories have upon us within the communities involved?

Selection of Participants

Creswell (2007) notes that in narrative research studies one or two participants are adequate or more may be utilized for a collective study. The number of participants in this study will be 3 adults who are between the ages of 30 and 46. According to Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, & Kokko (2005), before this age most participants have not achieved an identity. Selection will also be based on participants identifying themselves as members of an indigenous culture, who attended non-indigenous schools and are willing to be interviewed and share their stories.

The researcher in the recruitment of participants for the study utilized indigenous listservs. The initial responses to the recruitment emails included three indigenous individuals
who did not have time to participate in the study and one who did not meet the requirement of a second language. There was one additional individual who met the requirements of the study, but eventually was not used due to saturation of the data.

The participants in the study were accessed through local networking knowledge of indigenous individuals and the Internet Public Library. One participant is a registered member of the Historical Nipmuc Tribe, which is one of the sovereign clans of Nipmuc people (LM). The second participant is of the Wampanoag Tribe and lineage is Wampanoag and Narragansett (AW). The third participant is a registered member of the Narragansett Indian Tribe and lineage is Narragansett & Niantic (also spelled Neyhantic) (LS).

This study involves purposeful sampling, which follows the guideline within the literature. Maxwell (2005) describes this strategy as one, which involves a particular setting, participants, and activities that are specifically selected to obtain information that otherwise would not be attainable. The purposeful sampling selection of the participants in this study is to provide an understanding of the research problem of the study of academic achievement of indigenous students within a non-indigenous environment.

Maxwell (2005) lists four goals for purposeful sampling:

1. The purposeful critical sampling of indigenous participants would guarantee information about their individual perspectives as part of a marginalized group regarding their attendance of non-indigenous schools.

2. The entire range of variation and not the average, which Guba & Lincoln (1989) state is the “maximum variation” (p. 178) sampling. Important variations of the indigenous population will be selected that is most relevant to the study, for example different genders, backgrounds,
and career choices will be selected. Seidman (1998) also supports that maximum variation sampling is an effective strategy to select participants for interviewing for a study.

3. The selection of cases will be critical of the theories that are used at the beginning of the study. Extreme as opposed to typical indigenous cases will be selected for more convincing support of the conclusions.

4. The establishment of comparisons to show the reasons behind the settings and the participants. The comparisons between the indigenous participants and non-indigenous settings will show the processes, meanings, and influences, which are the predominant strength of qualitative research.

Age. Different factors were considered in choosing the age of 30-46 in the adult indigenous participants within the study. Erikson (1959) defines human development in eight stages in the formation of identity, where ego identity forms through the sum of childhood experiences and by the gradual identification of the child within these stages. Identity formation does not begin or end with adolescence, according to Erikson (1959), but is a lifelong process that is unconscious to the individual and his society. He describes the end of adolescence as a time where there are a number of significant identities, which undergo alteration through identity crises, with the end result of a unique identity. This suggests that at the end of adolescence, the individual should be able to make healthy choices regarding intimacy and formation of relationships, vocations, and her/his role within society. Identity development throughout childhood and adolescence may affect adult decisions later in life. Marcia (2005) supports there is a relationship between identity status and adult intimacy in the literature. This group was also chosen due to rational developed by Freeman (2002) who states the unconscious is narrative in
nature. Varela (1999) supports that interacting through an autobiography allows the narrative unconscious to become conscious with subsequent awareness and added memory.

**Language.** Selection of the participants also included the criteria that they were bilingual. Leinyui (2005) explains that bilingual is the ability of control and contact of two languages. Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor (1977) state the language of a group can represent ethnic identity (discussed in Chapter 2) and solidarity among the group. Including English, the indigenous languages of the three participants are Algonquin, Wampanoag, and Narragansett. The criteria of language as a factor will be explored to understand the relationship between language and positive or negative identity formation in indigenous adults. Negative experiences may be, according to McCarty et al. (2009), experiences of linguistic assimilation with the negotiation of placing heritage language in lives and identities in circumstances of unequal power relations. The literature discusses English as a language of conquest and the study by McCarty et al. (2009) supports English “as a language of colonization” (p. 300) (identity, power, and colonization were discussed in Chapter 2). The effect of Native language shift and retention of Native American language learning, identity formation, and academic achievement will be explored in this study.

**Collection of Data**

“When you’ve taken the opportunity to listen, and the opportunity to observe, then you, too, will have a story to tell” (Charles, 2009, p. 368). There will be different modes of collection of data through interviews, observations, and journaling.

**Interviews.** These stories will be elicited by open-ended, one-to-one conversational interviews that will allow the participants to speak through dialogue. Creswell (2007) describes open-ended interviews as letting the participants tell their stories through open-ended research questions that are developed and shaped after listening to the participants and the researcher
refraining from the role of the expert. An interview protocol of five open-ended questions will be used. Creswell (2007) states that an interview protocol allows the researcher to take notes during the interview. The seven open-ended questions will be a guide, but may be molded and changed as the stories unfold. There will be an initial face-to-face 90-minute interview per participant, which will describe the context of the restructuring of experiences. A 30 minute follow up interview will be conducted, depending on availability, one week later to allow the participants to reflect upon their stories and possibly add on remembered information. The interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. Member checking will be conducted by sending the transcribed interviews to the participants to check for accuracy.

**Observations.** Observations of the participants during the interviews will be conducted. There will be an observation protocol that will include recording descriptive information. These will be in the form of field notes describing verbal and nonverbal responses that may include facial expressions and body language. The observation protocol will include descriptive reflective note taking by the researcher to expand upon written observations.

Creswell (2007) describes multiple modes of data collection as the backbone of qualitative research. The research instruments will include a collection of individual stories that will consist of text. An “inductive mode” (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, p. 11) will be utilized in which the data will tell its own story. Creswell (2007) supports that examining the data inductively allows one to work from a particular to a general perspective of raw data in which to build and form larger categories or coded themes.

**Journaling.** The researcher will use journaling or memos to help in the reflection upon the events as they occur. Creswell (2007) states that memos help with self-reflection of personal reactions to the participants’ stories. Self-reflection will aid in developing and recognizing
emerging themes as they develop with subsequent coding into categories and identifying possible patterns. Coding for patterns and themes will help to identify the setting, characters, and resolution of the plot of the participants’ stories.

**Analysis of the Data**

Analysis of the data will be based on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative inquiry approach: interaction, continuity, and situation. This is based on Dewey’s philosophy that personal and social experiences that are continuous.

1. There is personal and social interaction. Interaction involves personal (the individual’s experiences) and social experiences (the individual interacting with others) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Personal will involve looking at the internal feelings of the participants and aesthetic reactions. Social will involve looking at conditions in the environment. The transcribed data is analyzed for the personal experiences of the participants as the storyteller and their interactions with other people.

2. Narrative research is continuous. Continuity (past, present, and future) is important in narrative research. The text is analyzed for past experiences of the storyteller and for present experiences through actions in an event that will occur in the future. Past experiences of the participants of the transcripts will be analyzed. Present experiences will be analyzed in connection with events or actions that may occur in the future. This will result in the analysis of the past, present, and future.

3. The setting in the text will be analyzed to look for specific situations within the participants’ stories. The text will be analyzed for the situation or place, in which the narrative researcher looks for particular physical situations or the chronology of the storyteller’s places.
Through the sequence of the storyteller’s places, the researcher will look at the time and context of the situation or setting to look for the intentions of the characters and different points of view.

No software will be used in the analysis of the data. Data will be stored on a password secure computer. Data analysis will begin after the transcribing of the interviews. Transcripts will be read and reread carefully to pull out important information. Key themes will be established to look for patterns in participants’ experiences and perspectives. There will be sensitivity to the participants’ point of view. According to Creswell (2007) the final report should include the voices of the people involved. As the research evolves, there will be storytelling and re-storying of the participants’ stories with their voices being heard along with the researcher’s voice.

The interviews will be coded in the exact order that they were conducted. After reading and coding the interviews in sequence initially, there will be rereading of the interviews with recoding. Significant meanings of themes of the participants’ stories will be coded in different colors. The codes will be examined for duplication and collapsing of codes will occur if they fall under the same theme (for example, language/communication can be broken down into one code).

Specific data analysis coding technique will follow Saldana’s (2009) narrative coding methodology. According to Saldana (2009) narrative coding allows the researcher to investigate the intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of the participants through stories. He goes on to explain that the writing requires rich description of participants’ lives by retelling their stories through their culture and not through European or Western perspectives. Gubrium & Hostein (2009) note that in analyzing narrative text sociological contexts as well as psychological contexts need to be addressed because stories are not separate but occur within societies that are influenced
by relationships, local cultures, jobs, and organizations. Rubin & Rubin (1995) state the messages, morals, or beliefs are important in the story and not the specific events that occur.

Saldana (2009) describes coding and sub coding schemes in Narrative Coding:

1. Type: survivor narrative, epiphany narrative, coming out narrative or cautionary tale.

2. Genre: melodrama, tragedy or comedy.

3. Purpose: personal/historical, moral, therapeutic or emancipatory.

4. Setting: environment, local color, season.

5. Plot: chronological, scene, conflict/complications, rising action, climax, and subplot.


7. Characterization: physical descriptions, motivations.

8. Form: monologue or dialogue.


11. Spoken features: pause, tone, emphasis/stress, and fluency.

Data analysis will also include in the initial cycle In Vivo Coding. According to Saldana (2009) In Vivo Coding allows researchers to prioritize and respect the participant’s voice. It references actual words or phrases from the data that the participants use (Strauss, 1987). Saldana (2009) notes that In Vivo Coding allows the researcher to extract “indigenous terms” (p. 74). After the interviews are transcribed, there will be coding and recoding after the interview tapes are listened to more than once the reading of the transcription. Analysis will also include memo writing during the coding process. According to Saldana 2009 memo writing before, during, and after coding is important in analysis for reflection and discovery of the data.
Thematic coding of the data will be conducted. Saldana (2009) states that a theme is the result of coding, categorizing, and reflection upon the data. Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain themes as ideas that are stated by the participants in the course of interviews or they may result from the researcher’s reflection upon the data. Saldana (2009) describes themes as descriptions or explanations within participants’ stories.

Second cycle coding will include Pattern Coding. Saldana (2009) states that pattern codes pull material together into summary units for further analysis. Previous codes will be examined for similarities and patterns. Pattern Coding will be used to describe major themes or relationships from the data (Saldana 2009).

Validity and Credibility

Validity in qualitative research measures the accuracy of the findings of the data and the ability of the researcher to convince the reader to find truth and trustworthiness in her/his interpretations and conclusions (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation will be used to establish validity and trust. Denzin & Lincoln (1996) explain four types of triangulation: (1) data triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources; (2) investigator triangulation, the use of different researchers. This could be through peer reviewing & external audits as additional ways to insure validity; (3) theory triangulation, where multiple perspectives are used to interpret the data; and (4) in methodological triangulation different methodologies are utilized to research the problem.

This study will involve a form of investigator triangulation. Member checking of themes will be brought back to the participants to determine if the information is adequate. This will be done through an ongoing collaborative relationship between the researcher and participants during the study. The following includes some of the responses of the participants when the themes are brought back to them for member checking, validation and discussion.
AW notes:

Thank you for keeping me informed of the entire process. Wasn't sure what I'd find as a result but from what you've shared, seems fairly comprehensive already. Not sure I would want to compile more on top of the categories you've outlined. Much of what you listed could be applied to my relationships with outsiders as well as even internally (family, fellow tribal members, etc.) Rabbit hole looks pretty deep as it is so I don't want to make it any more complex then it should or may already be. Thank you again for keeping me involved in the entire process.

LS expresses, “No Thoughts at this time. Good luck.”

LM states in reference to the themes, “I like 2 (marginality) and 4 (colonization). I think they really speak to the issues. Thanks.” Member checking allows the participants to be co-researchers in the study and to add additional information to the researcher’s interpretations of the data (Meneses, 2007). These responses are brought back to the themes for validation and added into the study’s data analysis and interpretation of the findings.

In the collection of data, Golafshani (2003) states that multiple methods “will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities” (p. 604). The researcher will use triangulation through multiple forms of data collection such as observation, memos and journaling with subsequent reflection, interviews, and recordings. These different forms of collection will aid in the trustworthiness and understanding of the findings in the study.

According to Maxwell (2005), validity threat is the key to the possibilities of what may be wrong in the study and the researcher should anticipate, identify, and develop strategies to rule out these threats. He explains that in qualitative studies, “researcher bias and researcher reactivity upon the participants are the two biggest validity threats” (p. 108).

**Bias.** An important validity threat relating to bias in this study is the interpretation of the results from the researcher’s perspective rather than from the indigenous perspective of the
participants. Creswell (2007) states that the language of the participants should guide the development of the codes during analysis. In order to prevent the researcher’s voice from overcoming the voices of the participants, the researcher plans to use Vivo Coding, which will present the material in the indigenous participants’ own words. In this way, the participants’ stories will guide the development of codes and emerging patterns of theme. This will enable the researcher to compare and contrast the rich amount of data from the participants’ perspectives.

Maxwell (2005) describes that prolonged engagement and observation enables the building of trust between the researcher and the participants, the learning of the culture, and prevents any misinformation that may result. The researcher will be the only data collector to minimize bias in the study. This will help build rapport and communication with the participants involved. The intent of personal communication through conversational interviews will build trust between the researcher and participants and at the same time provide an opportunity for the researcher to learn the Native American culture. This communication will also convey the integrity of the researcher throughout the study resulting in the portrayal of the research from the participants’ perspective. There will be constant interacting between the researcher and the participants through an extended period of time by interviews and observations.

Observations will be conducted during the interviews that Maxwell (2005) states will provide observational strategies, which will provide creative insight into developing good interview questions. Interview questions will be open-ended so as not predetermine the participants’ responses. In depth interviewing will help validity by acquiring a rich and sufficient amount of data will be collected to obtain results.

Bias may be reduced, according to Maxwell (2005), by including “verbatim transcripts” (p. 110) of the interviews for the evidence presented to rule out validity threats. In order to
minimize this effect, the researcher will use audio and video recordings to secure accuracy of information provided. Transcripts will be checked and rechecked for errors during transcription. Detailed descriptive notes (transcribing of the events) will be conducted to remove any bias from the conclusions. The coding of the data and the emergence of patterns in themes from the transcripts will result from the data itself and not the result of predetermination from the interview questions or the study’s theoretical framework.

Creswell (2007) notes there should “be reflexivity by the researcher” (p. 215) concerning one’s position within the study. Maxwell (2005) also states that careful attention to the personal motives and goals of the researcher can influence the validity of the study’s conclusions. The researcher plans to use reflective memos concerning personal thoughts on identity and diversity to gain awareness and provide insight into the research study. Through self-awareness, the researcher plans to reflect upon her research role, personal intentions, goals, and the connections of these throughout the study and upon its findings. These will include the values and expectations that she will bring to the study and how these may affect its outcomes. There will be assessment and communication of these effects upon the study.

Reactivity. According to Maxwell (2005), reactivity is the researcher’s influence upon the stories of the participants involved. Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun (2012) also refer to observer effect, which is the effect of the observer on the behavior of the subjects. Maxwell (2005) explains that it is more important to understand how the researcher is influencing what the participant is saying and the subsequent deductions that she/he may draw from the interviews conducted. The researcher will be aware that observer effect and its influences that cannot be controlled. In order to minimize the observer effect the researcher will ask questions that are not leading in nature and will be aware of her influence upon the participants along with the setting
the interview is conducted in. The researcher will provide opportunities for the participants to be comfortable during the conversational interviews and show genuine interest while they tell their educational stories in their own words. Discussions during the interviews will also include environments that they identify with and are comfortable in.

The question arises if identity formation is the same in different cultures. According to Cote and Levine (2002), the work of Erikson’s psychological stages can be used across different cultures. But, the researcher will not generalize indigenous people across other indigenous cultures. Though indigenous people may share some attributes across cultures, they are unique as separate indigenous cultures.

**Limitations**

Limitations in this study could involve researcher personal experiences/perceptions. Denzin (1989b) notes that the “criteria of interpretation” (Creswell, 2009, p. 214) in the quality of the biography is based upon respecting the thick description and the perspective of the researcher, who is writing oneself into the story of the participant involved. He further explains this may involve setting aside “preoccupation with method, validation, reliability, generalizability” (Creswell, 2009, pp. 214) and focusing on the participants’ meanings and interpretations of experiences as they tell their stand alone stories, which is the ultimate goal.

The limitations of doing a qualitative study with 3 participants, is that, the results cannot be generalized, however the objective of this study is not to provide generalizations, but to give a thick description of the context. Creswell (2009) explains the value lies in the particulars and not the generalizations that emerge from the description and themes. Denzin (1989b) states that the focus should be on interpretation and thick description, in which the researcher describes the process, historical and interactions of a particular experience.
Protection of Human Subjects

There will be no risks involved in participating in this study. Although there are also no benefits to participating in this study, it is the hope of the researcher that individuals involved will benefit in learning along with feelings of empowerment of teaching others by sharing their stories and possibly bring about change through their stories. The participation of the individuals involved is voluntary and they may withdraw from the study at anytime. An informed consent form will be presented to the participants in this study. The consent form will state the purposes, risks, benefits, contact information, conditions of the participants, and the right to refuse to participate. This form will be explained verbally before they sign the written consent form.

In participating, confidentiality will be maintained and DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) explain that the anonymity of the interviewee must be preserved also due to the risk to one’s position within the organization. This may be especially true if the interviewees vent their frustrations when sharing their experiences. The names of the participants will not be revealed and their identities will be protected in any documents and interview transcripts. Audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription.

Conclusion

This study aims to provide an understanding of indigenous participants’ perceptions of their educational experience in a non-indigenous environment. The study will provide knowledge of how students can benefit from approaches implementing Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, in particular indigenous learners due to their particular needs. The significance of this knowledge may be applied to the diverse needs of all students. Additionally this study provides an opportunity to consider different ways of engaging and motivating students through global curriculums that are related to student culture. This new knowledge may lead students to take
more control of their own learning and to compete in the global economy of tomorrow.

Indigenous knowledge is about looking at the world from a different perspective. It is a healing process that has social, psychological, educational and ecological values. In today’s global world, there is a need to look towards the community. This community may be local, national or international, which is be able to work together as one to address poverty, gender and race issues. Indigenous knowledge allows one to revisit the past, apply it to the present and be able to live in the future harmoniously.

As more and more scholars recognize the inclusion of indigenous or local knowledge in teacher learning curricula, there will be a need to provide new and innovative ways of thinking and problem solving in education. New ways of thinking may contribute to a common Western and indigenous curriculum that looks towards the community and is culturally safe, challenging, and respectful of other cultural knowledge. Through collaboration, we can work on and repair social differences. Educators could include in their teaching the respect of other types of knowledges. Indigenous and Western education can be incorporated as equal ways of learning in schools. Indigenous knowledge is holistic in nature, respectful of nature and all life forms. These are values that are worth preserving and passing on to the next generation.

Chapter 4: Stories of Educational Journeys

This chapter will bring voice, as transcribed, to the stories of the educational journeys of three indigenous adults as they go through non-indigenous schools as indigenous students.

Participant #1: LM’s Journey

Interviewer: I am going to ask you a few questions. We’ll start off with your background. Maybe we can start with your age.

LM: I am 45.
Interviewer: What is your general education, such as what schools you went to?

LM: I went to high school, technical high and Springfield. Then I went to Westfield State. Then I went to Quinsigamond College.

Interviewer: What did you study at those colleges?

LM: Westfield State clinical psychology and drug and alcohol addiction, then Quinsigamond anthropology and liberal arts.

Interviewer: Did you get a BA?

LM: Both of them I didn’t finish because I went on to do other things, but I had numerous credits. I went on to writing and working.

Interviewer: How about languages? How many do you speak?

LM: Some of my Algonquian language. Yes.

Interviewer: So you speak English and Algonquian. What is your first educational experience that you can remember?

LM: As a kid? Obviously. Kindergarten, I remember my mom taking me to school and me being very afraid and now it is just kind of memories. But she reminds me of some of the stories and how the teachers said I was afraid of everybody and that is one of the first memories I have of going to school is being afraid.

Interviewer: Was this at a non-indigenous school?

LM: Yes, it was.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of this school?

LM: Yes, it was Brookings School. I think the school is still there.

Interviewer: Was this a k-8 school?

LM: K-6 at that time.
Interviewer: Tell me about the rest of your education, as much as you can remember from that point on and we can go in sequence?

LM: Right off the bat, I’ll back up a little bit. My mom, and I talk about this now, but as you said what my experiences were. I am first generation urban Indian or city. My mom and all her family and she talks primarily of how they all grew up in the woods in the country, in the Berkshires or northeastern Connecticut, which is where we are now like Palmford and Hampton and they are still very woody now these places in the Berkshires. Imagine in the 30’s and 40’s when she was a teenage girl. So, I bring that up because they didn’t have to deal with anybody but each other. They were in the woods and if anybody was ever around like white folks and so forth they were the farmers and all, so they knew who they were. So they would associate with each other. This kind of goes into the genealogical research on how people find second and third cousins marrying each other and then like when the brother dies during the Civil War, the other brother comes and marries the widow and so on. But I bring all that up because I think that when we first moved to the city as indigenous people, I don’t think my mother and folks had any idea of what we would go through as kids. So she met my father and they moved to Springfield and my father’s family is also from Canada. They moved to Manus Key from there to New Haven. They met up in Springfield somehow and he also left when I was 4 years old because he had an alcohol problem. His family is also native. They are indigenous people from Canada. There was bad alcohol and drug addiction and he left when I was 4.

So getting back, so early on we just felt different all the time and I don’t think anybody around me, my mom or especially my brothers, were not prepared to cope with surroundings. So the first memories I had when growing up, we just didn’t know where we fit in. I laugh about this now. The white kids didn’t like us because we were too dark. The black kids didn’t like us because we were too light. It was a peculiar phenomenon we had to go through. So people said, well what are you. Well we are native. So, what does that mean? Things are not like they are now. There has been a great movement since the 70’s and 80’s. So, early on coming up in the 70’s and 80’s, as I was a child. It wasn’t a great movement as we’ve seen, as it is now, the culture being able to go and teach. So, I didn’t know all the things I needed to know about my identity or I wasn’t comfortable enough with my identity to care about it. So, what I knew mostly about Indians was what I saw on TV or that I am supposed to do certain things. So, it was really a lot of confusion about what I am, who I am and where I fit in. So that is the earliest memory and my oldest brother, they gave him nicknames. They called him Injun Joe from the Tom Sawyer movie because that was popular when I was a kid.

So, these are the kind of things. I just remember always trying to fit in. I think that and I know that it affected my education and the choices that I made and how we were treated by the
teachers. They would call us names and my hair much like my sons were. It was a lot longer because that’s part of our tradition to grow our hair long. Some of the earlier memories of teachers pulling my hair and wondering why I wouldn’t cut it and making fun of us. These are the teachers. So, it was a hard time. It wasn’t a pretty childhood as I recall.

Interviewer: What was it like to go to a non-indigenous school as an indigenous student?

LM: A lot of pressure, a lot misunderstanding. I remember early on, there was a mix 70/30, 70% black 30% white neighborhood that we lived in. So, I went back and forth trying to find my place within this culture. I was hanging with relatives who were probably going through similar things because the native population is minus 1% in New England. I remember going back and forth. Certain things really stuck out, I never forgot. Some of the black kids had an expression that over the summer they were going home. That meant going south, down south. I knew there was a movement during the 60’s where a lot of families came up from the south and mostly the black kids in the neighborhood had southern roots. They perplexed me. I’m already home and didn’t know it. I could not acknowledge that within myself. They had this familiarity with the foods and the collard greens and all that. All the while my grand folks, they were still living in the Berkshires and we would go there on the weekends and eat the succotash and bannock and all that. But, I never really knew what I was engaging in or picking the wild fruits and all that was really keeping me connected me with my indigenous roots. It was kind of a way to escape the reality that I was actually living in. I didn’t really acknowledge it at the time or understand it.

But, I just always kind of felt left out. These kids were talking about going home and I’m home but didn’t know it. The white kids, there was a lot of segregation at that time, so would try to have friends with them. I went through periods of having white friends and black friends. It was really crazy. You would always be the outsider looking in these different cultures.

Interviewer: You felt like you were living in two worlds or more than one world?

LM: Probably, yeah, more than one world. My mom, and of course the father wasn’t there, my father and all the while nobody really to reach out to. It wasn’t until later on in life when I got into my twenties, which we can get to after, how I began to go back really talking to my grandparents before. They’ve passed now. I didn’t have the wear about to pick their brain and start reaching out. We would go to Pow wows and stuff as kids, but I really wasn’t making that connection this is who I am. I thought it was just something to do as a past time as a way someone would go to a picnic. I didn’t realize this was a way out of the emptiness. I didn’t really understand it at the time.

Interviewer: Sounds like you didn’t know what to identify with?
LM: Right. Right. Indians were seen as very stupid and backwards, savages. I remember kids asking me to make it rain or walk on hot coals, we can disappear, and telling my brother all these crazy things and you actually start buying into them because you don’t understand. Then you see in all the crazy movies that came out, you know the old Hollywood movies. So to really, a mess you become, you know, to understand these things, then not to mention the rampant alcohol all through our family. As my mom came to the urban area, several dozen other family clans of ours came to the urban area, but also with that they brought the alcohol disease with them and I was observing my older cousins in their twenties just dying off, whole families dying off from drinking themselves to death. So they weren’t anybody I could reach out to. But, I do have vivid memories of doing our traditional hunting and fishing, going on spear fishing in the Westfield River and Swift River and all that and some of these things they could do when they were sober. So those are some of the things that I look back to now.

Interviewer: What kind of student were you?

LM: Kind of introspective, introverted, I was very quiet, Then later on in life I became more boisterous because I began drinking. I found something to fill the void. I don’t drink anymore. But, I was very smart kid. I was always smart. I was always interested in learning things. I was fascinated with astronomy. I wanted to be an astronomer as a kid. I loved sports. I think that was my most vivid memory being attracted to science and reading and writing. I loved what words could do. I was writing poetry as a kid and science, things I am still fascinated with, you know, the universe, writing, and communication and just other peoples. I think just because of my life experience of being sort of propelled into all these different environments, I talk about it. I really think I have not only have an unique perspective of people, but a really inside look, because I have shared with all the other cultures. But even to this day it is part of the reason that I write. Very few people understand the first people of this land. It is amazing. I know I know what soul food is. I know what St. Patrick’s Day and all these other things that, you know, Christmas and the 4th of July, Kwanza and all these different things other cultures celebrate that have been here for hundreds of years. But still, they know very little about what we do, like our moon ceremonies, or why we are so attached to our land. They don’t have the slightest clue.

Interviewer: Can you describe your friends for me?

LM: I remember a friend ‘E’; he was a redheaded white kid. He was a good friend. We’d hang out for a while, ‘S’ and ‘C’, two brothers, who were black. We had similar interests, smart kids. I think I was I was lucky to have them at the time because I really didn’t feel like I was having this intricate connection with large groups of friends where like I said you see the black kids, the white kids, the Irish kids having these large groups of social collectivism, where they are all
doing things. Other than the pow wow, I just couldn’t be in my town and fell like apart of it or wherever we were. So, they had similar interests as I. We liked reading and talking about space, you know. There was another friend I had growing up with. We were very close. He was actually from Laos, a Laotian kid. We found that we had a lot in common. I remember his family was sponsored to come here and they grew up in the forest part of Springfield. I was really attracted to his family. He had one brother and seven sisters. It was kind of a wild house and them being Asiatic, we all seemed to fit in, you know, having similar features, but shorter, (ha, ha). So, he was another good friend. But, um, it seemed that the friends, whether they were white or black or whatever they were, people kind of stood out within their community as want to reach out and be different, you know. I was always reminded that I was not really one of them. I remember being with my friend ‘E’ and then there other kids around and they would do bonfires in the woods or whatever and he said you have to tell them you are Portuguese or you are Italian. Don’t tell them you are Indian.

I remember, I must have been about twelve, I was hanging with ‘S’ and his brother ‘C’ and there were some other kids, black kids. They would call each other the “n” word and they would say it freely. You know, I am close friends with these kids and so I say it and then one of the kids told his mother on me. He brought me to his house and his mother came and she chastised me, yelled at me and said, “How dare you call my son that,” and she went on and on. I was totally confused, “What’s going on here?” I’m one of you guys. I’m part of this, you know, I’m hanging out. I’m friends, where like brothers here. Why can’t I say it?” Again, I’m reminded, you know. These are the things that really stood out to me as a kid.

Interviewer: Where did you feel at ease or what did you identify with, if anywhere?

LM: My grandpa, my grandma, being at their house out in the woods out on Claus Anderson Rd in Southwick, back there and the dirt road. It is now paved and being out there with my brothers and there were trails, there was a cow patch behind his house. It just seemed like it went forever, you know, I don’t know, it seemed like it just went for miles in the woods and there were trails there and a cow patch. We would pick berries and try to avoid stepping in the cow pies. We would bring them back and he would make his bannock bread, like or call it dough dads or fried bread, some people call it. There are different names for it. It was such happy times. I remember grandpa, he would (ha, ha), and he would see these big hornets on the door getting nectar, whatever. He’d pick them up with his hands and look at them and laugh and let them go. They would never sting him.

I don’t know, sometimes I marvel and think back how I look at a bee today. How did grandpa pick those bees up without getting stung? He would pick them up and laugh, “Look it, he’s mad”. Then he would let it go. He would walk in the woods and talk about his mother, who was
‘LV’, who was a medicine woman or herbalist. We hate to use the term medicine woman because it really conjures up all these images of somebody out making it rain but to really know what it means is somebody who makes use of all the plants and wildlife for natural healing as our ancestors did for thousands of years, where a lot has been lost. I would ask him, “Where’s her garden?” He said, “Her garden is the woods.” She would know all the different plants to go to get different things and medicines and make poultices and things of that nature. Unfortunately, a lot of that has been lost.

I remember him talking about how we see daisies as weeds and they’ll be used for several different poultices as intoxicants to clean and purify the daisy roots. But, I guess, the most, of course my grandma too. Grandma and grandpa was the time.

Interviewer: How old were you when they passed on?

LM: I was in my early thirties. My grandfather lived to be 94. My grandmother died a few years before him about 72. She was twenty years younger than him. They really made me the happiest because my mom, she wasn’t single. She remarried and had a stepfather. I’m not comfortable with that term. He was you know, not a father at all to us. She was dealing with her own stuff. So being with my grandparents was the happiest time as a kid.

Interviewer: We talked a little about language. You mentioned that you spoke a little of your language.

LM: Algonquin, Nipmuc dialect of Algonquin.

Interviewer: What language do you identify with?

LM: You mean speak freely or think?

Interviewer: I would say what you think or identify with or comfortable with. Do you just do one or a little bit of the other? What is the main?

LM: I speak better English, but I identify more with the Nipmuc language, because that is what really defines everything that I am and where I come from, you know, and my connection to the land. For example, the word Massachusetts, and Ponca Pog, and Connecticut, those are all Algonquin words in my language. Quapaws, Quinapog, Wamasett, Quikumumonochog (Chaubunagungamaug), which is the place up the road, Oxford. Those are all words that are intrinsic to my being. So, I identify more with that.
Interviewer: Do you ever think in your native tongue?

LM: I try to. My cousin ‘DTP’, he’s our language teacher, if you saw some of the stuff on the Web. We were fortunate enough; he was the linguist for the film *We Shall Remain*, the documentary.

Interviewer: I didn’t see the documentary, but I saw the advertisement for that.

LM: So we are speaking freely in the film there, the language, my cousin Dave, he was coordinating all the language. They also brought in a lot of Natives in from California with their own dialect and languages. Of course, we wanted to have the eastern language because that’s what it is focused on. *We shall Remain* chronicling the days of the pilgrims and the first meeting of the tribal people here. So the language was in Algonquin.

Interviewer: Tell me about your present occupation and how you decided upon it.

I am a writer, a coach, an educator, and a performer. I feel I’ve always had a personal talent to kind of share with people. It kind of segwayed into what I’ve done as the moneymaking thing I’ve done most of my life, which was human services. I’ve been a mental house counselor; I worked that almost fifteen years, and a public speaker. I think given all the things that I’ve been through and seeing what my ancestors went through, I always felt my goal was to teach and educate as a performer with my drum. We are known as the Quabbin Lake Singers. We’ve traveled throughout the east and Canada sharing our tribal music. Every time, I go somewhere all over, it is a chance to talk about my people and where we come from and pass on information on who we are as Nipmuc people.

Interviewer: Through your music?

LM: Through my music.

Interviewer: You travel around the country and you perform?

LM: Yeah, my kids, my cousins. We sang all over Montreal, Quebec City, D.C., you know, all over different places over many years since 2000.

Interviewer: Tell me about your writing?

LM: Writing was a way to propel everything that I have been doing musically and performance wise. It really put it in another format where I think I wanted to bring it to the next level, to
educate and entertain at the same time. I always like to say teach people by accident, so they are caught up in the story and not realizing they are learning a history about Nipmuc people.

I’m also the tribal historian too, so I’ve been studying my tribe’s land transactions, the history such as the Kings Philip’s War of 1675, which really changed things for us dramatically. That was a really big moment epic in time for our tribe. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of information about the eastern woodland people, but there is some. When people come across it, it is in the academic texts. That said in 1675, the King’s Philip’s War broke out. August 21, King Philip was killed. Metacom, the Quaboag chief of Nipmuc was taken to Boston and beheaded, drawn and quartered. They are very chronological events without really giving life to these people. That is what I want to do such as these stories, such as the stories of Monowat. I give you more of a background, they had a life, they laughed, they cried, they had aspirations. Their life didn’t begin when the pilgrims landed. Their life didn’t begin with the beginning of the war and end there. So a lot of things that we see we hear about Indians during the pilgrims. Then we won’t show up again until Geronimo sometimes. There are a whole lot of things that happened to us that get us where we are today.

I see, you know, I have been told that as a writer, we are always self-conscious, you know, and always so deprecating. At least, I know I am. So always like, am I good enough? Am I good enough? Maybe that comes from other things too. But I have been told throughout the years that I am very talented. So that gives me confidence to keep writing. So with that confidence, I try to bring forth the stories of tribal people that can benefit all native people and not just native people but benefit the world. Teaching about American history that is really not spoken about enough I think.

Interviewer: Are you married?

LM: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you meet your spouse?

LM: I met her in a supermarket. I was shopping, literally shopping. We’ve been married nineteen years. We have four children. I’m a grandfather. My oldest daughter she is 22 now. When I met my wife she had a little girl. I adopted her as my own and then we had 3 boys. As I said my daughter, she’s 22 now and she has a boy. He’s 1 and half. My sons are all teenagers now.

Interviewer: How do you think educational experiences affected you as a person that you are today?
LM: I think that all the years growing up, you know, the grades kindergarten through I guess all of high school, really had a negative impact on me. The things that I’ve learned, the college was great, all the years of the two universities that I mentioned earlier, that I learned a lot there.

But, also the most important thing that I learned going back to my grandfather, the elders, and going into places like we are now to the archives. I spent many years of reading, researching history and reading books that are, you know, are elusive to most people. That people are not thinking about to really learn the history of America. I read different perspectives… I read tons of history, you know. I love to learn about history, but also native history, where just read like a lot about what the first settlers said and different things. Then you start piecing together the truth because they’re obviously slanted in what they are saying. The savages are frolicking about in the woods. You’re hearing things like that. You take what they say and you look at historical facts, you begin putting these things together. You come out with an accurate picture of history.

Interviewer: The missing pieces?

LM: Right. Right.

Interviewer: Do you write a column?


Interviewer: I was reading the column. It was very interesting.

LM: Yes, I write for Indian Country Today. I put some pieces in there from time to time.

Interviewer: Let’s back up a little. What was your first elementary school?


Interviewer: What was your junior high?

LM: Forest Park Junior High, I think that was the worst, ugh. It was so awful.

Interviewer: We’ll come back to that.


Interviewer: What town?
LM: Springfield, all of them in Springfield.

Interviewer: Let’s back up to your junior high. Why was that awful?

LM: Because I’m 45, I can’t recall the years right now. It must have been in the late 70’s, I guess. There was a lot of segregation; all the brown and black kids were bust out. As I said, I lived in a predominately black area; the Forest Park Junior High was in the Italian white area. So they were busing in the kids from my color and darker. So there was so much bitterness and ugliness at that time.

Interviewer: From the busing?

LM: Yeah. There was a saying that if you didn’t make on it the bus, you should run your ass all the way home.

Incidentally, that was during the time of my Laosan friend. His name was ‘N’. We called him Coon in his language. So he lived in Forest Park. I’ll touch on that right now. As I said, I came attached to this family and I would stay over there sometimes. As I said, they lived in Forest Park, I remember a time we were walking back from the theatre in Forest Park and this gang of white kids attacked us with chains and bottles. They hit us and struck us. They even had dogs after us. It was insane. They had dogs.

Interviewer: How old were you?

LM: About, 14 at the time. We were just walking. Hey you fuckin’ chinks and spics. They were calling me spic, which is obviously a term for Puerto Rican. I’m thinking’ I’m Indian you asshole. There were like five of them and the next thing you know, this kid comes charging at me with a stick and he hits me. We start running and they had chains and they were throwing at us. We split up and I remember I was running. A kid throws a bottle and it hits me in the head. I keep running and I don’t know my way around that area because I live, you know, the other side of town. I don’t know how to get back to his house. I don’t know where he went. He’s got punched in the mouth. He took off somewhere. I wind up holding up at some gas station. I remember I had to make a run for it and I run right into these freakin’ kids and they have a dog and then somehow I end up getting away and ran all the way home. That was a hell of a time.

But, inside the school was just as bad because all the black kids were so angry at the white kids. I wanted to hang out with some white kids cause some of them were my friends, but I couldn’t.
Then, I wanted to be with some of the black kids, but I couldn’t. What in the hell, what is going on here? It was awful.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you were in the middle or?

LM: Yes, all the time.

Then, I had these racist teachers that I was dealing with, saying negative things. Cause it was okay for everybody to make fun of Indians. That was something that everyone agreed on in the school. Indians were kind of to be ridiculed. Hey, there’s a savage and they would do the stupid war hoop. It was pretty dismal. It was just so uncomfortable. So, I would act out. That was when I started drinking and drinking heavy, doing stupid things to stand out, getting in trouble, getting suspended, getting into fights.

Interviewer: That’s how you got attention?

LM: Yeah. Right, to get that attention to try to stand out or whatever. As I said, it was really a horrible feeling, you know, trying to find your place. Being with these black kids, there was always someone in the crowd would say you’re not one of us. The white kids, there’s always someone saying you’re not one of us. I guess eventually just got to the point, “You’re right, I’m not and it’s time for me to find where I belong,” so to speak. I found my way home. Thank god! Many Native people don’t. They die inside the bottle like a lot of my relatives did. They died sniffing glue and huffing paint and things like that or just dying in the street, you know. So eventually, I went to the army, as most Native people do. I went in there and started drinking more heavy. I did my time there, got out, you know. Then I just realized that I was either going to die, I started turning my life around, you know at the age of 22. Something just clicked with me, a gift from the creator.

I remember watching a show on PBS just at the time I was coming into sobriety. There was this show about Christopher Columbus and the discovery. I was just getting some enlightenment into my heritage. It was talking about the Indians were not mentioned in the Bible, a group of people that God never mentions and how alcohol was brought to indigenous people. This anger came over me, “What the blank are we doing?” This is their stuff, no wonder it’s having such a dilatory effect on us. This wasn’t meant for us. Christianity was used to enslave our ancestors and we’re not mentioned in their Bible.

We’ve been duped for so long. A lot of my writings are harsh on Christianity, as it should be. You are going to find many Catholics, who are Native, some are Jehovah Witnesses. It’s funny some of my father’s folks practice Judaism. I tell people and they laugh. They are trying to find
their way like everyone else. But for me it’s my traditional culture that I now embrace fully. Sometimes I tell people that I am more of an atheist than anything because I believe in the spiritual power of everything. I don’t see God as some anthropomorphic being that looks like me or kind of looks like someone else, making decisions. If I just pray hard enough he is going to make something happen when there is a million kids dying right now in Rwanda how somehow how my little needs to have a new iPod is more important than those kids dying. I said that is utterly ridiculous. The generations that were slaughtered before me and people who are gone already. We don’t know, my elders, the medicine people; they had the right idea when they talk about the Great Mystery because that’s what it is.

Native spirituality is more connected to science than anything that you are ever going to see because we talk about the tree, the water, how we say we are spiritually connected to these things. We can talk to them. It wasn’t a metaphor sense that they try to make excuses for the Bible and there are guys inside whales talking snakes and all those things. We’re talking about understanding the tree, the rock, the water; we are all made up of the same stuff. So obvious there is some sort of connection there. We’re realizing and acting out in a sense where, that’s why you see us respecting the water, land, not taking too much. Whereas the Christian Bible says you dominate the land, the animal, everything is subservient to you. Our traditional stories teach us that the animals talk to us long ago. They were our teachers, the wolf, the bear because the crow, which is my spirit animal. I tell people this today. You look at a crow or a bear; they could live out in a storm, could you? They can survive outside. They can do many different things we can’t do. So obviously, we are going to learn how to survive from these many elements of nature. We say we are talking to them. We are talking to them in our spirit because they’ve been here millions of years longer than we have or thousands of years. So obviously, they have a better understanding of this world we live in. So, we are not above something that’s been here a lot longer. So, we are to live in harmony and quality with these things.

Interviewer: Is there anything additional you want to say? It is so interesting. Really. I could listen forever.

LM: Oh, thanks.

Interviewer: Any additional experiences or perceptions?

LM: I think that it was fortunate; I mean with all the heartaches that I had growing up and the sadness. Like one of my cousins, ‘P’, she’s a beautiful educator too. She lives on the Cape. She talks about the historical trauma. I think all this trauma that was outside me. It forces to go in; escape and I think my way of escaping was my imagination and my ability to get out of this body because of all this pain it was in and to start seeing the universe and start thinking outside of it.
That was the gift that I was giving and take that and transform it into something positive through the music, through the writing, to actually make some use out of it. But as I said, most people, as we know, even with alcoholism, you know, 99% of the people, they are going to end up dying from it. It’s a very small amount of people, maybe it’s a little higher, and maybe that’s a large number. But for the most part, people don’t survive the drug addiction and alcoholism, you know. So I was fortunate to come out of that, you know. One day at a time, they say (laugh).

Interviewer: Is your family all spread out? Are they in this area or cousins? You did touch on your cousin.

LM: Yeah, he lives in Brimfield. Most of the Nipmuc people are within the Nipmuc homeland, which is from Springfield, to Natick, to northeast Connecticut and pretty much all of central Mass. So the bulk of all my family is all through Palmer, Springfield. Webster and northeast Connecticut.

There has been such a revival in our culture, in our tradition, not only people like myself, but many of the leaders of our tribe that have shaken off the yokes of colonialism and really got in touch with their culture, their roots, my mother, she’s one of the elders now. So it was a combination of things that caused us to survive. So this way of life is important to native people. They need it. Takaki talks about in his book, A Different Mirror, America was once called the melting pot, but what are we melting into? What am I going to melt into that is going to make me feel 100% human being, whole. You know, the idea is to get whole, if everything is Eurocentric. In a way it’s identifying one group and I’m supposed to fit into that, but what happens to me when I show up with my brown skin and different beliefs, cultural understandings. They don’t fit in with what’s being displayed in society. So then, that’s when conflict comes in. You know, my way is better that your way and so forth.

Interviewer: Do you think that is an identity issue?


Interviewer: The conflict.

LM: So we see America really making big steps. In one of my columns that I was writing about this, there have been big strides to make diversity throughout schools, but Latino, African, but there’s nothing for Native people. That’s the big lacking issue. One of my cousins, ‘K’, his son ‘J’, he’s about 12 now; his teacher was telling him there is no more Nipmucs. The kid’s sitting in class and the poor kid had to listen to that.
Interviewer: This was recently?

LM: Yeah, yeah, about four years ago. So I had to write them a letter, or council, not only are we here, we’re plenty, we’re trying to thrive the best we can. Of course, the Nipmucs are here to tell that kid we’re not here, you’re perpetuating genocide. That’s mental abuse, you know, kind of thing. So these are the things we’re still dealing with. But we are able to deal with them quickly, not like when I was a kid. I just had to go through it and my brothers. So we all suffered in our own way.

Interviewer: It sounds like that teacher needs to be educated.

LM: Yes, yes, big time.

Like what you are doing and other people in your tribe and your relatives are doing, teaching. Like you said there isn’t an awful lot out there.

When I took Native American studies at Quinsigamond, the professor, a great guy, Derek Gould, he laughed, he said, “You should be teaching this class.” I said, “Probably, but I’m always willing to learn. I can never learn enough, so I want to hear how you’re teaching.” He did a great job. I pretty much did help teach the class. But I learned many things along the road too there, because most of my studies throughout the eastern peoples, throughout Quebec, and the northeast, I had the chance to learn about other stories of tribes out there that I don’t really get to touch as much because there is so little done on here. But it was very enlightening. I pursue a lot of that learning too because they’re very similar too, the stories, just the geographics have just changed, the geology’s changed. The stories are very similar of how, you know, people come in, you know, you serf their land, discrimination, you know, suffering dying, you know. It goes on and on.

Interviewer: Tell me about stories of your history through your elders, like your grandparents. Do you remember any of those stories?

LM: Yeah, one of the stories shows up in my, the book, Tales from the Whispering Basket, Deal Me In was one of the stories, one of the folk stories.

Interviewer: I started to read that one.

LM: Right. In another of the stories they talk about how the drum came to our people.

Interviewer: Okay.
LM: How tobacco came to our people, the different moon cycles that we had. One of the stories that stands out to me, which is more actual events as of way they’ve interpreted it, you know, the spirituality. My mother’s brother, he’s about five years old. He’s passed on now. They grew up in the country, so they’re schools in his time; they were just the schoolhouses.

Interviewer: Yes.

LM: They only had the one house. They didn’t get much education. They were all farmers, tobacco growers. So tobacco being the sacred plant, I was always around it, growing it.

That’s what they did to make a living, my father and his father before him. So they were farmers. So my uncle, Brother, his name is ‘B’, they call him Brother, I guess he was about twelve going to school for the first time. I remember when he was drunk; he drank himself to death, unfortunately. He’s gone now, great beautiful human being. He was a military veteran back in his day during the Korean conflict. He talked about this story when he was inebriated. He was going to school. They decided he was going to school. So, he had these stigmas of being Indian. He looked just like me, very native, long hair. So he went to the school. All the kids there are white (laugh). They bring him in. The teacher introduces him, “Class this is ‘B’. He’s going to be with us. He’s an Indian. He’s going to be with us today.” So he sat in there for a few minutes. He said he had to go to the bathroom. He went to the outhouse and ran all the way home and never came back. He talks about it and I say “Why?” “Well they told everybody that I was an Indian. I couldn’t stay there now. I was going to get my ass kicked.” Because of the stigma, that was with being, identified. It was almost saying, “You have here a cut throat, a murderer.” You know, he felt like saying as an Indian, he felt that something bad was going to happen to him. He was now identified. So he couldn’t stay there. So he ran all the way home and never went back.

My great-grandmother, the one I talked about, “LV’, she spoke pretty fluid the Nipmuc language. I never got to meet her. She died in 1966 before I was born. So I would ask my grandpa, “How did she learn it?” So her parents taught her, who was ‘JAV’, and her mother ‘BW’, all Nipmuc people from Woodstock, Palmford area. Incidentally, ‘J’ and his brothers, they were all Civil War veterans. All of them went and fought in the Civil War, both sides. Sometimes they would show up in the white regiments, sometimes in the colored regiments.

I forget the writer’s name. He did a wonderful book, “Native Americans Veterans of New England”; Mashintucket Peoqot had an anthropologist and historian write a great book. But, anyway, getting back to ‘L’, I said, “Well, how did great-grandma learn the language?” “She learned by listening to her parents.” They were forbidden to teach her the language. So I said, “What’s that about?” ‘L’s parents, now we’re talking my great-great-grandparents, in order for them to go into town and find work or do anything viable, they were not allowed, didn’t want to hear them speaking their language. They were forbidden to speak it in public. So they did not want to pass down the Algonquin language to their kids. The only time they would speak the language was when ‘L’ was sleeping and the other kids. So she would stay up at night listening to them talk and that’s how she was able to absorb the words. They wouldn’t speak it in front of her. It gives me the chills just thinking about it, that to protect her, they would keep it from her. It breaks my heart just thinking about that.
Interviewer: The language almost died?

LM: Yes. She learned by listening at night. You know, it just breaks my heart thinking about it. That’s how she learned it, learned the words and phrases and learning more and more from talking to other elders, who were going through the same things. My cousin ‘TP’, his great-great-grandpa, ‘J’, the one I mentioned, his great-great-grand father, ‘C’, was the brother of my great-great-grandfather. His story was similar to mine, so he was able to keep the language through that family line. They all lived around Sturbridge and all that and so forth. So that’s how the language survived, just a handful of people speaking it.

Incidentally, back in the 1640’s, a minister named John Elliot, he created what they called praying towns, right here in Webster was one of them. Where they basically said Indians, Nipmucs in general, pray or be shot. Nipmucs were on the first reservations in New England and they were Christianized, their hair was cut, put in English clothes. So John Helliot what he had to do, he spoke Algonquin perfectly, so he created a bible and a book with Nipmuc and English. Actually, by accident, he helped preserve our language. So with his documents and some other documents that are left behind, we’re actually able to save our language, by actually, him trying to destroy it, you know. The Nipmuc bible is actually the first bible translated from native to English on the continent of United States.

Interviewer: Really.

LM: Yeah. John Elliot did that. It’s in Natick, Massachusetts, in the historical society. You can buy these bibles. There are a few of them left. They go for thousands and thousands of dollars. The original bible is written in Algonquin to Christianize the Indians. But it was also a translation. So, by this guy what he did was actually preserving it as he was trying to destroy it.

Interviewer: Exactly.

LM: Yeah.

Interviewer: You hear about a lot of native languages did not survive.

LM: Right.

The Mohican, who we work a lot with, with their casino money, I’m wicked against casinos. Because of the funding they had, they were able to fund linguistic projects to get the language off the ground. We all speak pretty much the same. We are all able to help each other with that. So the language is viable now. You know, it is pretty strong.

Interviewer: Good. Well I think we covered a lot. Is there anything else you would like to add?

LM: I talk so much. Plus, I was...
Interviewer: This is wonderful!

LM: Thank you. We’re still fighting, the Nipmuc people. We have land cases still sitting out there. We’re still fighting for rights. It’s really a sad, sad statement on the state and federal government that we still have to fight for the right to exist after all we’ve been through, you know. We’re right here; our community still needs a lot of resources. We’re still trying to get a community center for our youth, which we don’t have. These are the things we are still fighting for so kids coming up don’t have to go through what I’m going through. My sons are now teenagers, but we have a strong community now, even though we don’t have that. But I’ve seen some of the effects that I’ve went through on them of identity and sometimes they don’t know how to address their friends of being a native person. But now a days because I’m an educator, most of my friends think it’s pretty cool and I’m always making sure I teach them. All of my kids, I went to their school and did workshops since they were babies. We came with the drum and I came with my regalia and talked how these are not costumes. Costumes are what you wear at Halloween. We are not playing dress up. These are sacred clothes and things that we’ve took the time to make. They represent our spirituality. The kids are like, “Oh, wow, that’s cool.” I found that when you get a kid at a young age they can absorb it. I’ve worked in the field of mental health for many years. I’ve worked for doctors. There’s a lot of ignorance. They said the stupidest insulting things and I know they didn’t mean it. The level of ignorance is unhinged.

Interviewer: Lack of education. It sounds like.

LM: Right. You guys don’t know a thing about people that you are living with, right here sand now, living and breathing.

Interviewer: I think what you’re doing is very important. I would like to help.

LM: Thank you. Thank you.

Interviewer: Do you have more thoughts that you may want to add?

LM: I’m not a fan of religion but I do believe in the power of ceremony. As I said I’m not sure how to explain what god is or is not. Our Elders call that force the Great Mystery. I guess that’s the best way to describe it for me. But the power of our ceremonies … the Circle and the fire is that connection to all that is within the universe. As I shared with you, my childhood was not happy. But through the connection of my culture and ceremony- that has saved my life. And of course this is complimented by education. Education, knowledge is very important. Learning about whom and what we are brings a new purpose to one’s live. Learning true history can transform the stigmas and lies that some of us were taught to believe for so long. Knowledge is emotional and “spiritual” freedom. Not just for native people but for all so that we can all interact with the same knowledge or at least mutual understanding.
**Participant #2: AW’s Journey**

Interviewer: We’ll start off with some background information. Can you give me your age?

AW: 39. Just had my birthday the other day.

Interviewer: How about your education?

AW: Public schools went as far as the 10th grade.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you went to non-indigenous schools?

AW: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you describe your 1st educational experience that you can remember?

AW: I’m sure I didn’t even notice it was an educational experience. But, I mean, I learned a lot from life experiences.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: So, they probably taught me anything than what I learned in school.

Interviewer: Do you remember your first experience in school? Your first something in school?

AW: School for me growing up was something you try to forget because it was so hard, because of the long hair. I kept it in braids. My mom always put it in two pigtails. She still won’t let me cut it as you can see. It was long, if not longer. I had the girlish features. This was before Fabio. So, boys weren’t supposed to have long hair.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: I went through a lot of abuse, when I was in elementary school.

Interviewer: That was your first experience?

AW: Yeah.
Interviewer: okay, tell me about the rest of your educational experiences. I know that you seem to be trying to get away from it. If you could try to remember some and explain them to me, it would be helpful.

AW: The personal stuff I was going through was one thing, but my parents were still encouraging me to put my best effort towards learning. I did do my best. I had far better grades in grade school that I did in high school.

Interviewer: You did?

AW: I enjoyed being around kids, playing, having fun when they were not picking on me. I could actually develop friendships and bonds. I think probably it helped me. I wasn’t distracted passing notes and goofing off friends. I don’t have those friends.

So, there were certain subjects that gravitated to me. When I look back at when I failed or when I lost interest or whatever. Schooling it was a disconnection with either the teacher was or your relationship with them was either good or it wasn’t. It’s not that it was a bad relationship. It was just chemistry like with a love life, you know, it’s either there or it’s not. There were certain, Mr.’W’, he was in my elementary school in 3rd or 5th grade. But, I think he was our math teacher or homeroom, whatever it was. It was in his class we were in, when we had to stand for the pledge of allegiance. That was always awkward and uncomfortable. But, then he would put on a record, “Leader of the Pack” every morning.

Interviewer: Okay. Every morning?

AW: Every morning. Just like doing that pledge of allegiance. Mr. ‘W’. would put on “Leader of the Pack”, vroom….vroom (laugh), that little bit of fun in his classroom. I shed so many tears, when that man passed away. I was still young. He was a cool teacher. Through or even up into high school there were some teachers. I don’t want to miss his class. I get a lot out of it when I can. He’s cool. I get along with him, some classes, it’s boring, the subject matter is boring. I’m not interested in this.

Interviewer: What grade did he teach again?

AW: Who?

Interviewer: Your favorite teacher.

AW: Mr. ‘W’?
Interviewer: Yes.

AW: It was elementary somewhere about 3rd or 5th grade.

Interviewer: What was the name of your elementary? Do you remember?

AW: Charlestown Elementary School in Charlestown.

Interviewer: Charlestown, RI?

AW: That’s where I was born and raised.

Interviewer: Was that k-5 or 6?

AW: Elementary. I try to remember like middle school. I don’t know if we even had middle school.

Interviewer: Some are k-8. Some are k-5 or 6.

AW: It was at least 6.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: CHERAHO was a regional high school that I ended up in when I was still in RI before my parents separated. It’s an acronym for many towns, it accommodates. It’s one of those schools that it’s not just for that town.

Interviewer: Regional?

AW: District, regional. Having been in education now, I always try to limit my groups, quantity over quality. Most schools that I see success had a lower population in the classroom.

Interviewer: Right.

AW: They were definitely overwhelmed there. I want to say that might’ve been middle high school. I mean it’s changed now. They actually have a middle school and high school. When I was there, it was also a tech. It wasn’t necessarily an academic school. It was a tech school. It wasn’t accredited. You’re gonna go to this school and you’re gonna get a diploma and nobody is
gonna want to wipe their ass with that diploma. They didn’t have a football program there. I would of loved to play football. It was a pretty low budget school, very sheltered, like no diversity, what so ever, very narrow minded too, very racist. Still kind of like that. I’m sure things have changed a little bit. It was really tough. Just that whole region, there was very little native people, very little ethnicity beyond a few handful of natives that were there.

Interviewer: So, that was the high school you were describing.

AW: Middle high school, I can’t remember. I think it was 6th grade. Elementary went to 6th grade and then I transferred up to CHERAHO, which I think was middle school built into the high school.

Interviewer: Yes, some schools have that.

AW: It was definitely low budget. There was a lot they threw into that school that clearly didn’t work.

Interviewer: Right.

AW: Most people went on to be volunteer firemen from that school or commit suicide.

Interviewer: What town? I know you said it was regional.

AW: It was acronym. So, CHERAHO means Charlestown, Ashland, Richmond, Hopkinton, I believe.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: Those were the towns that went there. So that’s like four towns going to one high school.

Interviewer: So it was huge?

AW: Grant it, these are rural places, nothing but turf fields and farms mainly. So it wasn’t a heavily populated area. It wasn’t like a city.

Interviewer: Okay.
AW: But still, four towns, one school. Looking back on it, having been in education. I think they set themselves up with failure with that one. Transferred up to here when my mom separated, so 9th and 10th. I stayed in 10th grade for 4 years. I just couldn’t get any further.

Interviewer: You transferred up into this…?

AW: I came up here. My parents separated. When I came up here, you know, not having my father beat my ass like he was pretty much on a daily basis when I was there. Making new friendships totally different environment, you know, a lot of diversity, a lot ethnicities, friendships were easy to establish and keep. Needless to say a lot more distractions not as much discipline led me to just slack off and not take it serious. I eventually got kicked out.

Interviewer: Which school was this?

AW: This was Falmouth High School, Falmouth, Massachusetts on the cape.

Interviewer: Okay. Yes.

AW: My mom separated. She’s from the cape. She’s Mashpee, Wampanoag. My dad’s Narragansett, Pequot, which is RI where I was raised on the Narragansett land. That’s their community and then Pequot is the ones that own Fox Woods in Connecticut. That’s where his mom was.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: But I stayed up here once my mom separated. Started my own families up here and what not, which stayed.

Interviewer: Okay, I want to back track a little bit about your background and your parents, where there tribes… Do you remember your grandparents?

AW: Yes.

Interviewer: So, your father’s father and mother were from Mashpee, did you say?

AW: No, RI.

Interviewer: Narragansett?
AW: I don’t know where my grandmother, per say. She lived next door when we were growing up.

Interviewer: Okay, in RI?

AW: Yeah, we used to go get her mail and go see her on holidays and all that. She died at a young age, I barely, barely remember all that, but she was there. She was right next-door. Where she came from prior to that I am not sure. Pretty sure she was of Pequot lineage, which means that family came from Connecticut. But, I want to say she may have met my grandfather, my grandfather on my father’s side came from the Providence area. My father was raised in the city, Providence as far as I know. It wasn’t until he got his little piece of land and moved us to the reservation.

Interviewer: What reservation was that?

AW: That was Charlestown reservation, Narragansett reservation.

Interviewer: Narragansett, Charlestown, and your mother’s side that was the Mashpee? Is that correct?

AW: My mom’s parents…I heard this story about my grandfather hitched a ride on a milk truck back when they were delivering milk bottles still, from New Bedford. I guess he was a left over product of the whaling. A lot of our people went all over the world, when whaling was going on. He ended up in New Bedford; fell in love with my grandmother. She was the one who had the land in Mashpee, I think, where we are. He moved there, built a house, raised my parents, and raised my mom, at least.

Interviewer: Okay. We are going to go ahead to you describing your educational experiences. I know you touched on this a little bit. What was it like to be an indigenous person going through a non-indigenous school? I know you started to touch on this.

AW: A lot of challenges, personal challenges that I already pointed out. The physical appearance, I was a scrawny kid too. It probably made it easy for them to pick on me. I wasn’t the tallest, obviously I have become now, but you know, I wasn’t always. I don’t even know if I’m intimidating. I guess I am intimidating from what people say, but I’m not trying to be. But, needless to say, it was not like that when I was a kid. I was very vulnerable. I can’t say I have a shell from talking on the phone with somebody. I remember my mom said of our kids, “You seem to have the easiest time making friends. You don’t have a chip on your shoulder. You’re approachable. You approach people. You’re nice. You make friends easier than your brothers
seem to.” I know it wasn’t the way I acted. I’m pretty sure it was the way I looked. Like I said, the hair caused a lot of problems. Sometimes our own, not relatives, other tribal members are cutting their hair, their spikin’ it, trying to do what they can to blend in so they’re not picked on. What better way not to pick on, than to pick on the kid, so they think that you’re on their side? You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes. Yes.

AW: So, even my own peers, people who are trying to grow their own hair now, want to have their own casino now, you know.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: They were some of the people makin’ fun of me. So, yeah, those things were rough, but as for the academic stuff you know, it was challenging too. You know, pledge of allegiance, I learned at a pretty young age, this is not right, you know. This is like Arian nation, Adolf Hitler type shit. I have to stand a certain. I don’t have a choice in this matter. Yeah, I was born here, but this isn’t even your country. You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes. Yes.

AW: At a very young age that challenged me and still does. As I get older it is more obvious, wow, these people are just rude. It wasn’t until I became an adult, the language, the clothing; all of it is totally European. It’s becoming more bothersome as I get older. But, especially as we get farther away from our traditional ways, we get farther away from respecting this land, which is at its wits end. I sure, I hope to God these prophecies fulfill themselves and something catastrophic happens, cause the world needs a wakeup call, you know. We’ve gotten so far away from traditional ways and worshiping the land, you know. That’s the stuff that was always important to me. Where I grew up it was country, playing in the woods, climbin’ trees, jumping out of one tree and jumpin’ into another tree like some dam flyin’ squirrel. That was the kind of upbringing I had and I wouldn’t change it for anything. I definitely wouldn’t trade it in for no video game or nothin’ or Internet.

Learning, though, like, like George Washington and these iconic heroes of America, you know, just about every history lesson, social studies that I went home with, you know. My dad is the main reason I am doing what I am doing. He did programs. He went out to colleges. He didn’t visit nearly as many elementary schools as I’m doing. If he did, I didn’t know about it. But, he usually asked us to do these educational programs for colleges, whatever. He showed me at a young age that it is important to demonstrate and express ourselves rather than letting Hollywood
imagery and books and other things speak for us. So, that’s why I do what I do. When I was young, you know, it was obvious we were different. We had different things. When I hear him speaking at these things helped me understand our differences and to be proud of our culture. At the same rate, when you get sent home with a homework assignment about Christopher Columbus and the teacher told you what you were supposed to know about Christopher Columbus and your dad tells you what really need to know about Christopher Columbus you come back in with this homework assignment that does not reflect anything the teacher share with you and you get graded with a “f” or thrown out of school. You get disciplined. You got chastised in the classroom in front of your peers probably. Luckily, your dad comes in and he does his best to address the situation. He has a little one on one with the teacher after school, whatever, or a phone call, you know. You can guys can try and teach my son, whatever, but we’re natives and I have every right to teach my son what I know what is accurate history. Those things presented themselves a lot more so, probably most kids.

I’m sure my brothers went through it because they were being raised in the same house.

Interviewer: How many brothers?”

AW: I had two brothers in the house when I grew up.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: But I mean as far as those other natives, especially the ones that are being picked on, that were picking on me, I should say. I don’t know if they were being taught that point of view. I don’t know if they understood that point of view. But, it was almost not an option in my household. “This is the truth. This is what you are going to go back and tell them. Whether they grade you favorably or not. You are going to do this report like this.” I really appreciate my dad doing that. I really do. I had to it for my kids at certain times.

Interviewer: Okay. All right. The next question, we discussed your schools. Where you went. You told me a little about what kind of student you were. Do you want to elaborate a little more on that?

AW: As far as…?

Interviewer: What kind of a student were you? You described…

AW: Never made honor roll, close to it, when I was in elementary school. Once recess went away school though, school wasn’t as appealing, obviously, work gets harder. I was in all CP courses in high school. Like trying to prepare me for college. I don’t know I could have had an
easier time, taken easier courses, not that I wanted to be SPED, you know, special ed., but, you know, I think probably I might have not felt so overwhelmed or challenged with the courses that I was taking. But, in the same respect, I’m sure my parents wanted me to strive harder and succeed. So, I can see why they put me in those classes, but as a parent, you know, you are never given a yes or no or book that tells you, you are doing the right thing. This is how you be a parent, you know. My parents, you know, my dad, you know, all the loving stuff, he beat us. He was physical with us, forcing us, always talking down, like you’re never doing good enough. He hardly ever gave that praise that you need. Thank you; you’re doing a good job son; me, always praising my children. I’ve got five kids of my own. The oldest one pretty much went through high school; two of them graduated; one of them dropped out. I can’t be the father beatin’ him. I can’t be the father forcing him to go to school. He’s made his choice; dropped out the same year I dropped out. I would be a hypocrite if I told him, “You can’t do that.” He’s under the false impression that I’m successful. He sees me doing movies. He sees me in books. He’s sees everyone thinking I’m famous and successful. When everyday is a struggle, you know. He doesn’t realize that. If I had paid attention, I’m sure things would have been a little easier in life, but you know, that’s his choice. It’s his life. They other two are doing great things, you know. You can’t win them all.

I’m doing best with what I’ve learned. What I’ve seen. What I’ve been through. What I know as a child, as a father. So, I think I could’ve done worse. I definitely could’ve applied myself better. But all, in all, I learned. I learned a great deal. I don’t know if I’ve learned…people seem impressed with my knowledge. They’re seemed impressed with my manner of speaking. The way I can express myself, articulate words. But, I don’t know how much I can attribute to school, you know. I listened to my father when he did speaking. Anyone who’s doing public speaking, I watch and I learn from it, you know, President Obama, anybody. Some people are just really good at it and obviously those are the people that I want to take cues from because I get asked a lot to do public speaking. I get asked a lot to speak in behalf of our culture. So to do it in an articulate way and get the point across without too much run around. Those are some things that I’ve seen some people excel at and others just run around and babble on.

So, I don’t know how much I learned in school. There were experiences and many of them were negative. I definitely learned some things, you know. But I don’t know how much of that actually stuck, I still benefit from.

Interviewer: So, by the time you made it to 10th grade, you had lost interest. Is that right?

AW: It was a distraction. High school, any kid, you get in high school, it’s challenging. You have to find a click. If you’re not in a click, you’re a loner; everyone will probably focus on you. You’re isolated, you know, like you don’t have people to count on, whatever. High school’s a
tough time for kids, period. I suppose I could blame it on my parent’s separation, but I don’t want to blame anyone but myself. So, I know for a fact, I was distracted when I got up there. I wasn’t disciplined. My Mom was working and didn’t stick around to make sure I got off to school. So, I took full advantage of that. It was not that she had to. I was in high school. You’re pretty much almost a grown assed man. Should be getting’ yourself up and out of the house every morning. She’s doing it. She’s going to work to pay your bills. I definitely, definitely could’ve tried harder, but I lost interest. My dad always had problems with sleepin’. He sleeps a lot. He’s late everywhere as you saw today. It’s kind of a family trait. It’s haunted me my whole life, definitely affected school. I didn’t feel the need to get up. Didn’t want to get up, stay up late, go to bed late, wake up late, go to school late. I mean, it’s not like I would just wake up, oh, my mom’s not here I don’t have to go to school. I kind of wanted to show her; at least I tried to get to school.

I had to hitchhike every day, whether I was in RI or Massachusetts. If you ever miss school, you hitchhike to get there. So I would hitchhike, but the only reason I would hitchhike to school, when I was in high school up on the cape was, I just wanted to find out where the party was. I just wanted to hang out with my friends. That’s where it got at the end. In the beginning it was fun. I was meeting new people. I was still learning freshman year. I think it was freshman year I moved up here. No, actually I think it was sophomore year. I just never made it past the sophomore year. I stuck it out like for four years. They eventually kicked me out. There was a physical altercation that I got into with some kid, who was attackin’ the woman, who’s at the time was havin’ my first-born. She was pregnant. He threw a brush at her, some stupid…needless to say he assaulted the woman who has my child in her belly, you know. I wanted to kick his ass. The school didn’t want to let me and that’s when they called the police on me; literally chased me out of the high school.

I didn’t think I would be in a school again or have any interest. I mean, he told me himself, the principal when I was in the back of the cruiser, you know. “You’re a failure, you’re not going anywhere, you’re not tryin’, you’re not applyin’ yourself. You’re a loser. You’ll always be a loser. The next time I see you, it’s gonna be in the court report or the obituary.”

Interviewer: That was the principal?

AW: Yeah, at Falmouth High School. Can’t remember if his name was Mr. ‘F’ or somethin’ like that. Been meaning to catch up with him and show him I disproved his theory. But, I’m pretty sure I can see why he said it too. He was trying to motivate me to prove him wrong. But, deep down inside, I think honestly, there was a piece of him that honestly believed all the nonsense he spit at me that day. It wasn’t like I set out to disprove him. It’s just; I’m living my life, bro. That’s something you and every other teacher never understood. You can try to mold me into
what you think an average American kid should be, but I’m not that average American kid, as you should of already realized, you know. I’m not botherin’ people.

So, if you of just let me do things the way I kind of needed to do things, you know, and to me having researched this issue that you’re studying right now. It’s just what I know about our culture that’s what we always done with our children, you know. When you’re child is born, you don’t even have a name for them, you don’t know who they are, you don’t know them. You’re arrogant if you think you do. Unless something catalytic happened around the time of birth, you know. My buddy’s name is ‘B’ and it’s because he was born on a type of moon. Rare circumstances like that, something really big happens. Yeah, you have a name already, but, normally no. You’re born, your parents watch you. They observe you. Everyone in the community watches this child and observes them. This is what I see and suggest or just figure out a name that reflects those qualities that in that child. Then, that child grows those qualities or develops new ones. That name changes and reflects the changes in the child’s life until sometimes we get set in our ways as an adult and that name will probably stick eventually. But, went through an average of three names, three identities. Cause you’re a kid you’re experimenting until you find out what life is to you and what motivates you, you know. What you’re going to pursue with your life. So, teachers don’t understand that, school, America, doesn’t understand that, you know. This is a sad time. I’ve reserved this room from one to two. We have to be here. There is no flexuation. I don’t care if you get pulled over on the way here. You know what I mean? It’s so rigid. I don’t want to understand your problems. You have to cater to my schedule. Your grade system, you’re five years old, you’re goin’ to kindergarten. When you’re six, first grade, you know and so on and so forth. The best schools I’ve seen in all my work and I’ve traveled to a lot of schools. Montessori schools, Montessori schools do not do that. It’s experiential learning. The kids are playing with blocks and whatever else, things that they gravitate to. Promote that and find ways to integrate other topics and subjects. The kid learns doing things that the kid enjoys doing therefore they enjoy learning. It’s not a grade system. It’s not you’re five years old; you should be at this level.

SAT’S and all these others, MCAS, it just seems to be getting more difficult for a kid to be a kid and to learn cause the schools are so rigid. It’s like; I don’t know if it works. I haven’t seen the MCAS, yet MCAS it’s only been around maybe a decade, I don’t know. I’m curious to see what the research proves. What’s goin’ on before. What’s goin’ around now. Cause, I don’t know, I can point out you’re bombarding kids. You’re stressing a higher dropout rate, you know. I don’t know if it’s working. I didn’t work for me. It still doesn’t. You saw it. I just showed up at 2 o’clock.

Interviewer: Are you saying, in your opinion that Montessori schools are closer to indigenous ways?
AW: I haven’t had the privilege of being schooled in indigenous schools. But I have had the privilege of seeing them. Wow, it’s exactly what I needed. I mean, God I wish and I hope to God I can get it for our kids. Our tribe was recognized in 2007, so we’re still trying to get up to speed. Where other tribes may have been through much longer.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: Narragansett, where I grew up, they now have an indigenous school, if you will. I don’t know if they call it a charter school or what they call it. I want to call it an Indian Day School. I don’t know what the term is, but it’s an indigenous school. Taught by indigenous parents, educators, teachers, what have you. They develop their own curriculum. They’re not necessarily basing it off the state frameworks, whatever. Not sure what model they may have based theirs off of. But, you know, it’s been up and running for probably close to a decade. I guess some kids have graduated from there. One of them is in college now. So, it worked for him. The schools that I was able to observe were Alaska had some immersion schools. Hawaii had extensive amount of immersion schools. I really, really liked the Hawaiian model and the way it was working. Basically they based theirs off of the Mowery example. The Mowery was a strong mode. That promoted pride in your heritage. Still taught you, I guess academics. But throughout you’re being taught your culture. The culture is embedded in your everyday schooling in various forms. It worked for them. It worked so well the Hawaiian’s adopted it. Then, I guess when the queen, you know of Hawaii was on her final days, she realized our lands have been taken over, being dominated by a dominate culture, which is not ours and familiar to us. Despite it all, I want to make sure that our kids will learn our culture. I guess, that’s when she created these schools, first started. They’ve been in existence ever since her passing and they keep them, even though she’s long gone.

As a cultural person, as a cultural educator, especially as a parent, as kid who went through what I went through in school. Wow, wow, what a difference. Ukulele, when they walked in the school. We were there to perform as part of a multicultural group touring the country, visiting entire regions. One of our performers was Hawaiian, native Hawaiian. When we went to Hawaii we visited a lot of schools in two weeks. These two different islands, both years I went. You walk in the average school, the ukulele’s playing, and their chanting with the kids in their language. They’re learning those songs. You go through the library and you look, and not only did they have books, of course, but they had gourds. The gourds went tap, tap…clap, thump, make their music from, you know, that gourd was right there with the library, library book. That was a powerful symbol to me. Wow, if I could of saw my drums, when they were ramming this European shit down my throat. I would of at least said, you’re open to my way of life, you’re just not trying to totally eradicate it, you know. I would of felt that as a kid even. These kids are
seeing that every day. They’re seeing Hawaiians that look like them, teaching them, caring about them, things that they genuinely care about with those children. Things that are important to their culture, to their existence. Yeah, yeah, I’m sure that comes through to the kid, I’m sure that comes through to the kid. My teachers didn’t give a shit about me. They demonstrated that time and time again. I’d tell them, “Hey these kids are pickin’ on me, calling me, “long haired, sissy queer faggot. Can you do something?” “Well, what the hell are you doing in the boys’ room anyway? The girls’ is across the hall.” This what my teachers said to me. They defended their position, when my dad comes in says, “Well, he maybe your hero, but he’s not ours. So my teachers pretty much expressed throughout, very few of them said, “No, we do understand ‘A’ different and we’re willing to work with that. I mean, grant it, I was a rebel and I probably made it hard for every teacher that worked with me, most likely. But, I mean, it was pretty obvious that a lot of my teachers didn’t give a shit, about who I am or my differences or try to promote that.

Actually, I work with kids. Again, I don’t know what you know about my background. I do for work, but mainly visit schools, something I look forward to most. I really feel, I hope, I making a change in the world, when I visit these kids. Yeah, I can talk about pilgrims and all that other stuff. But even some of the morals I try to embed in these kids. Some of you have freckles. That is something you cannot change and the rest of you should not be pickin’ on that. The kid cannot change his freckles. Some kids cannot change being obese, you know. I look at the biggest loser. Those are super heroes. When I look at the biggest loser TV shows, those are super heroes. They genetically sometimes cannot change. They work hard on some of those episodes and actually gain weight. Like, how many of you can just eat? I can eat all that I want and I get thinner if everything. These people sometimes these people can’t change who they are and for you to ridicule them, you know that’s not good. It’s not hospitable. It’s not good for humanity. It’s just not good over all. It’s not good for you. It’s not good for them. It’s not good for us as humans, you know.

I try to work with lessons like that for people to understand. Things are so rigid. You’re supposed to do this. You’re not supposed to do that. There’s differences and I try to promote those differences, especially cultural ones, you know. Yeah, I wished I would of saw that in school. These indigenous schools that I have observed, they kind of do that, reinforcing the kid’s pride in themselves throughout their education. It worked. It worked.

Interviewer: So maybe these teachers that you had needed to be educated?

AW: Definitely could have had some cultural sensitivity training, not sure if some of them were qualified to be teachers in the first place. The way some of them talked to me. “You can’t do that. I’m a kid, a kid; you’re an adult, you’re pretty much pickin’ on me. You should be ashamed of yourself. You should not be a teacher. You should be home ashamed of yourself in my
opinion.” Teachers, I’m sure, are totally oblivious. I don’t know if they realize that they’ve done something that’s detrimental to this child and have changed his whole life. He’s going to remember this forever, you know. That’s the way I think when I’m in the school with kids. I want them to know positive things. I want them to think diligently about it. I don’t want to be offensive. Sometimes you are without knowing it. Some of those teachers weren’t, but some clearly were blatantly or racist or disrespectful or misunderstanding, whatever it was.

I’m courteous. Some of the teachers when I go to a school, a little kid comes up to me at the end of a program, “I’m really an Indian too. “Really.” They may look white. They may look black. I always entertain the idea. “Who is it, your mom, you’re dad? Which side is it? You’re gonna want to find out. Ask your kin about that side of the family for the answers you’ll be lookin’ for someday.” The teacher will come over after our little exchange and say, “Go play. She’s really not Indian. She thinks she is.” That’s where I feel this Scott Brown, Elizabeth Warren situation, you know, like just looking at you, “You’re not native. I don’t believe you.” You’re telling the kid you’re a liar. If their parents are in their house telling their kid they’re native This kid now got the courage to come up to a tall ass guy like me, total stranger, approach me a total stranger and share something like that about themselves and you totally disregard that and discourage it. I don’t think you should be a teacher. I mean I don’t know where these teachers come up from and what qualifications they need to prove.

Interviewer: When you were going through your childhood did your parents ever pass down any stories or grandparents? Stories to relate your history and culture to you?

AW: All the time. My dad was doing public events, you know. When he’s doing this (raised his hand), that it’s harder to listen. Now, I’m sittin’ back, when something, he said just pops and sticks, whatever. Those are usually the most powerful ones and many of us don’t realize they’re takin’ place. That’s why your very first question that’s kind of why I answered it that way. They told me stories. I use the stories that I always tell these children when I’m in these schools. Like I said trying to pull out awareness, like I was a kid. I went to a public school like this. It was very awkward for many reasons. But mainly, just that abuse really stands out and I don’t want to see it repeated. I’m really thankful your teachers have invited me here. I could of used something like this. I hope it’ll instill pride in all of you for all of our cultures. Go home ask your parents. I’m sure you came from somewhere. Most Americans, it’s really sad when they say I’m an American and that’s it. Somebody went through a lot to get you here so that you can enjoy whatever it is you think you are enjoying now. You owe it to them, to at least know, what they went through, where they came from, whatever, you know, a lot of people can’t. For me, having gone through what I do, I share with my students when I work in the classroom. Like, just about every school somehow I get on the subject of hair and I explain to them this is what I went through as a kid.
So hopefully, helping them, you know. Whatever you guys are going through, picture this (pointing to his hair) at that age. Hopefully, it helps in that way.

But, my mom helped me the most when getting through my hair, because there are two reasons I kept my hair. One, my mom explained at a pretty young age. I don’t know if it was grade school or middle school, prior to high school, I’m sure. She still braided my hair. She puts it in the two braids, which makes me look like the girl on Wendy’s, you know, pipilong-stocking braids. “Why are we doing this? I remember I got the courage to finally ask her. I think I probably asked her before, but just kind a had to reiterate it. “Why am I doing this, why do we have to…I’m going through hell here, mom? Why are you doing this? None of the other kids do it; even the other Indian kids don’t have long hair. Why are you doing this to me?” I don’t know if this is quote, unquote. But she said it to me. “Your hair is an extension of who you are. That’s why you grow it. As you see I’m braiding it to keep it neat and tidy. When you look at this braid.” I didn’t know how to braid at that time. She was still trying to teach me obviously. “There are three parts that go into that braid, that’s your body, your mind, and your spirit. That brings unity in yourself. When we put all those things together, we extend all those things. It’s a good thing.” I didn’t necessarily fully grasp it at that time. It was enough to help me through. As time has gone on, I can revisit that moment, over, and over, and over again every time I am challenged. I mean, I’ve come to just appreciate, I can’t imagine without my hair now. But, and dancing, you know a lot of things my dad beat into me. “You’re gonna get out there and do this grand entry. You’re gonna be on time. You’re gonna be out there the whole time. “What if I just want to run around and be a kid, you know, when you’re a kid. But, now you couldn’t beat it out of me. I need any opportunity to dance in a pow wow, circle, with my regalia all over it, you know, love it, love it.

So, yeah, there are certain stories that stood out. That one really helped me, you know, the one with my mom explaining my hair in that way. That’s something that I share with a lot of kids and makes a lot of sense to me as an adult. My kids luckily didn’t go through that. My kids clearly had long hair. They still do. Most of the kids in school now like it.

Interviewer: Right.

AW: They think they’re cool because of their long hair. So it’s totally, totally different for them. I’m glad they don’t have to go through that. That’s what, I think, helped me the most during my schooling honestly, because of that one day in my mom’s bathroom in Cox, RI before they got separated. I remember it clearly. I will never forget it, life-changing lesson. It was really quick and easy. I’m sure she had no clue at that time. I brought it up many times. I don’t know if she remembers it. But, I’ll never forget it, live by it. There were a lot of stories. That one I know for a fact that really helped me changed my life. There were a lot of cultural stories.
Interviewer: Yes.

AW: And even maybe not my parents, but other cultural stories. If you’re familiar with our stories, there’s a lot of morals built into them, as with every storybook and lesson, definitely, definitely, many stories. Every kid asks me, “Did Sky Woman really fall from the sky world and land in the water and the turtle saved her and now we are all living on the back of this turtle that she made this land from?” I believe it. Earth is alive. You can look at it very winter it dies, every spring it comes to life, you know. It’s a living thing. I believe that, you know. I believe Moshop the giant, who brought the Aquinnah Wampanoags over to the island of Martha’s Vineyard. I believe he did do much for them. It was one of their own people who killed the white whale he became. That Moby Dick guy you guys talk about. That was our legend before Herman Melville got a hold of it and turned Moby Dick into an evil villain. He was our cultural hero. I believe that story. I believe there’s a reason why Herman Melville wrote that story. Cause, he couldn’t have people feeling sorry for the whale that he was killin’. Yeah, as times go on we do realize that it’s their version; their version may be true. Every author is writing for an audience. When I read all the pilgrim writings, oh my god. It’s so blatantly obvious, I have to impress the king. I have to jazz up this story. I have to lie blatantly. In some ways, I can see that. In other ways, it’s like I’m not going to take time to ask these people so, I can understand what I am observing. I’m just going to observe and tell people what I think from what I know, because I’m an Englishman and I’ve only English ways, which is greed, overpopulating areas, disseminating land. This is all I know. That’s why I have to write these things. The savage doesn’t know how to clothe himself. I just don’t like excessive amounts of clothes. You kill the environment, when you demand more from it to clothe yourself. You’re sheltering yourself from the world to the point that you need AC, you need heat more than you would if you were just acclimating yourself to what’s going on around you. It’s just different philosophies. They don’t know how to use this land. Look at it, it’s just laying wasteful here. That’s what they said; when they saw all the trees that we took care of, you know. They had clear-cut theirs centuries before so these Indians don’t know how to use the land. When I read these things, clearly you’re looking at it through your lens. So, it has really helped me understand when I’m reading any book, Curious George, Clifford the Big Red Dog, I don’t care. Here’s an author and they’re writing to an audience. They’re writing from their own background and understanding, you know. There are a lot of lessons. There are some things that I pick out of books that other people don’t see. There are always learning opportunities that I’m getting at based on stories, interactions with other people, personal experiences. These are the things that I mostly benefit from.

Obviously, I got out of school at a very young age, tenth grade. Most people cannot believe that either when I speak or where I’ve one in life. I am still eager to learn. I try to learn, definitely
learn from tragedies, 9/11, you name it, Holocaust, you name it, something to learn there. Yeah, that’s what I’m still gaining from.

Interviewer: I know you did mention a friend named ‘B’. Can you describe any other friends, or more about ‘B’?

AW: What do you want to know?

Interviewer: Why you were friends? Describe them as people? Why you were friends with them?

AW: That particular guy, I befriended a lot of kids who were in trouble. Who I see getting themselves in trouble. I try to stay out of trouble. I’d try to help them stay out of trouble. Grant it, when I was really young, I got into trouble with them. Deep down inside I’d try to keep them out of trouble. Me and my buddy J, when we were in high school got suspended together. Let’s go down to the golf course. One of us would go into the woods and look for golf balls. The other one would sit up at the ball washer and wash them and we’d sell them and make some money. It’s an honest living. We could have been out there selling drugs or just sitting home enjoying skipping school or being suspended. But, trying to show him and myself a better way to get us up out of this rut and put some money in our pockets at least. There’s lots of ways. Kids that were always in trouble like, I remember one of my friends he popped a Valium, just to do it because he was bored. Then this guy said, “You’re only supposed to take half of that.” “Don’t worry, I can handle it.” He’s already showing effects of it. “It’s not even working.” “Dude you can see that it’s working.” “Just give it to me for later. I’ll eat it…” “Only if you promise to eat it later.” “I promise.” (Popping sound) sucked down another. Needless to say, I had to drop him off at his parents’ house. “Look at what this dude’s doing.” I’m sure he didn’t appreciate that. “You shouldn’t be doing that.” I probably could’ve kept him under my supervision, which, it wasn’t, my responsibility. I kind of wanted his parents to see. “Dude, listen up.”

Interviewer: How old were you?

AW: I was a teenager. I may not have been a teenager, close to twenty by then, young enough though. Shouldn’t been out drinkin’ and partying myself. I was raising three kids by the time I could by my own drink. Yeah, I mean, I was trying to look after people when I could. I’m not a saint, not a halo over my head, never said I was. I know for a fact, looking back most of the friendships I’ve seen, this kid ‘B’ you asked about, he spent a lot of time in jail at a young age, violence, anger, doesn’t know how to handle it. I can’t remember exactly why he approached me and how I first came to find out about him. He had a lot in common with me. Clearly, even though we came from different backgrounds. His grandmother is an important figure in our community. His mom I, in my opinion, doesn’t seem to have really much of a interest or
understanding of our culture. I think she’s kind of happy just being out there bein’ like everyone else. I think there was a black father that he had, that she went with. Clearly, you can’t count on your dad in that situation to show a way of life that he doesn’t know. The mom didn’t really know. He does spend a lot of time with his grandmother. He does try to learn from her. I felt that was a great opportunity, this guy’s a warrior. He punches holes in the wall. If we can get him to punch the right people for the right reasons, we’d doing a good thing for the right reasons. I’m tryin’ to help him understand that, unfortunately, he has burnt me a lot of times. He’s that kind of person and it’s happened not only with him, but a lot of the kid’s I’ve tried to help. They don’t see that obviously. Yeah, I try to help him, anyone that appeals to me and shows interest in the culture.

I need help, like, you know, I’m comin’ to find out all this stuff I’ve learned and all the stuff I’ve appreciated and grown to love so much, something our whole existence, our whole nation felt that way at one point. Whereas now, you are definitely a minority. I could care less about a casino. I could care less about not paying taxes, like, all these benefits that people want as a result of being native today. They don’t want to do the ceremony. They don’t want to sit out in the woods for days, just givin’ back to the land for all that it gives us, you know. They don’t want to take off work early just to go to a ceremony or attend a funeral. They don’t want to learn how to drum. They don’t want to sit there every week, commit that time every week. They’ll take their kid to practice every day and be a baseball star and teach him to be a basketball star, but, you’re not teachin’ that kid how to drum. You’re not teachin’ him how to dance. You don’t even know yourself. We’re losing more and more every generation. Right now, I’m in a very difficult time without realizing it, like I said, I’m try to reach out to people. You can be the change you want to be in the world, but you could very well be that only person in the world who believes that.

Yeah, that’s the situation I’m in right now. Yeah, like friendships over my life have been people growing up, there were very few Caucasian kids, where I grew up in RI that I could relate to, that could understood me. That didn’t want to pick on me just because they appreciated this kid’s different, you know. I don’t know what’s not to appreciate. Who wants the same average friend that anyone could have. I mean, I don’t know, I like unique people. But, you know, Puerto Rican kid, I remember when he moved in, boy was I glad, wow we have another ethnicity. He’s not Indian, he’s not black, he’s Puerto Rican. That’s a distinct group of people. His parents were both Puerto Rican. The food they prepared, the things that they had were different and I gravitated towards that. He was my best friend in grade school. A couple of the kids we hung out with were white and some of them looked me up on face book. “Yeah, I always think about you.” In the back of my mind, I thought you hated me. Like, you made me feel that way. Sometimes, I’ll tell them too. I really didn’t have many friends there. “Sorry, I haven’t been in touch, but. I’m kind of trying to forget about what happened at Charlestown Elementary.

Hopefully, I’m not doing it to be malicious. I’m not doing it to make them feel bad. But, they do need to reflect on how you treat people with your life, everyone does. But, my friends now a
days are people who are drumming, are attending ceremony. A lot of pow wow friends. You know, you got to a pow wow you’re dancing; you’re partying after with them. You look forward to seeing them, wherever. You don’t know. Sometimes, if they’re goin’ to this pow wow or that one, but if you get to a pow wow and you see them it’s good you’re friends. It’s pretty genuine, I guess. You grow up. You don’t see each other every day. You’re pretty close still. Those are friendships that come and go, kind of with the wind. Whereas long lasting friendships…

Haven’t been through what I’ve been through with my families. I’ve pretty much lost all my kids. I mean, we separated; I have two batches, if you will. I had a ten-year relationship with the first mother, three kids as a result of that. I went into an eight-year relationship with another woman and had two children. The first relationship, just leavin’ them, like a, I didn’t get to be there every day. I can hear their mom in the background. “Oh, he doesn’t care about you. He’s off tryin’ to have another family.” You know, hearing that, there’s probably far more of that being said everyday in front of these kids. It’s a miracle that my kids didn’t believe it. I mean, they’re old enough now. They’ve realized, they’ve come to live with me the last few years. They’re adults now and I’ve got to let them go. But, I lost a lot of time with them, just because I couldn’t get along with their mom. Their mom couldn’t stop beatin’ my ass, you know. She was very physical herself.

This other woman, she’s pretty much ripped my kids from me. She won’t let me see them. I’ve been to court. I love kids. I don’t know how any judge couldn’t see that. He clearly not pickin’ up a newspaper or flickin’ on a TV. I’m everywhere. You cannot know that I care about kids, you know. They granted her not sole custody, but just like I didn’t have visitation even like. What the hell did I do to deserve this, you know, So, it’s made me go into a shell as an adult and realize like, you invite people into your life like ‘B’ and others sometimes, they’re gonna get you. You show your vulnerability, your weakness, by being the caring thoughtful person that you are. Then think they are goin’ get over you every time if you let them. First time, shame on you. Second time, shame on me.

Realistically, now, my brother, who’s on his way to pick me up, I haven’t talk to that guy in months, months. I love him. He’s my last brother. Lost two of those brothers, on the way here. Baby brother died a crib death. I was probably five years old. I remember that. That was a lesson. My brother killed himself in front of me when I was 15. He was 22. So, I mean, another powerful lesson, right there, obviously. But, this is my last brother. I love him to death. But, some of the stuff he’s displayed, you know. He’s clearly tryin’ to get ahead, establish himself with our tribe, whoever. He had a position to give me work and he didn’t. He went about tryin’ to give it to other people. I’m homeless. I’m broke. I’m losing my children because they don’t want to be livin’ in the basement with me. You know this. You come pick me up there and your job was to give me work. Work that I’ve been beggin’ my tribe to give me. I don’t get paid for
what I do for my tribe. There’s nothing that I do for my tribe that I get compensated for and I care about my tribe. That’s why I deep doing it. I don’t even participate in tribal events now, for the same reason I can’t talk to my brother now, for the same reason I’ve had to turn my back on people like ‘B’, you know. Like, if you burn me enough, you use me up, I’ve got to protect myself from people like you, you know. When you show your true colors, I’m going to avoid you at all costs. If I know you are capable of lying to me, even it’s a subtle lie; even it’s a subtle lie, if I know you are capable of lying to me, I cannot trust you. I’m afraid of you because that’s bad. In our culture, that’s just the worst thing you can do. That’s why Squanto, they wanted to kill him. He was lying up till his deathbed, highly, highly offensive.

In our culture, you know as a person today, like, I try to be open with people. You may not want to hear this truth but I’m goin’ tell you the truth. Whether, you like it or not. Man, it just, just cringes me how many people lie. How many people think it’s harmless, you know. If you’re my brother, why do you need to lie to me, you know. “You don’t even realize your lying half the time. You don’t realize, clearly don’t realize how horrible your lie is to me, you know.” Like, it’s goin’ to be a very awkward situation when I get into the car with him because anything his says at this point is bullshit. It’s goin’ in one ear and out the other. “I love you. I care about you. I miss you. All that bullshit, you could’ve given me a job, bro. I’m still broke. I’m still homeless. That has not changed. You had an opportunity to at least help me through it. Grant it, it may not of fixed it and gottin’ rid of it, but definitely, I needed the help at the time more than ever, you know.”

I was surprised the chairman of our tribe said, “Give ‘A’ this job”. It was a few thousand, maybe even several thousand dollars. Like that would help. That’s a down payment on first last and security, you know, like something. I had nothing at that time, no work coming in, schools out for the summer. Yeah, so to me that was like, whoa, whoa. I wouldn’t of done it that way. If the chairman tells me give my brother a job, he’s already hired. It’s not even an issue. “I’ve got to protect myself. I can’t have it lookin’ like, I’m just givin’ my brother a favor or a hand out, you know. I’ve got to protect my ass.” Okay, I can kind of see that, but realistically dude, you’re out for yourself. That’s what I got out of it and that’s what I told him. He was like, “That’s not the way it was.” I can’t really take it any other way. You need to realize the choice you made. It’s divided us, bro, you know.”

The friendships I’ve had, it’s who I can trust. Who’s demonstrated throughout my life or over a period of time? They’ll be honest with me, there’ll be trust. “We will not see eye to eye. My native friends, when I got on the issues, you do realize that technically that none of you have to be here. I have the right to burn your house, have the right to slit your throat cause you’re here and you may or may not be welcome. It’s how you act. It’s how you conduct yourself. You can be my best friend and you’re sittin’ there tellin’ me that you have the right to pave my driveway
in your community because it’s my driveway. You’re gonna die, dude. You’re goin’ to be dead and that pavement is still goin’ be there, affectin’ my water, affectin’ my clams that I need, you know, like, I need to feed my family. If you’re goin’ be that arrogant, you’re goin’ be like, fuck you, fuck your land. Best friend or not I may want to slit your throat, you know. You’re askin’ me to put my friendship before my family, before my future generation. You know what I’m sayin’? I can’t do that regardless of how good a friend you are.”

Some people understand me, some people don’t. My own parents, I’m pretty sure, don’t understand me still, even though many of the things that I’ve developed as characteristics result from what they’ve taught me. But I don’t know if they really understand. I’m not trying to be offensive to people. I’m not trying to be boastful or arrogant or have more rights than anyone else. But, at the same rate when you learn what I’ve learned, when you live a life the way I’ve lived it, you know. You can’t change who you are. I’m not trying to hurt or bother anyone but, sometimes things bother me and hurt me. Those are the incidents that you got to try to have the patience to articulate word, be respectful, what not, so. I think we got off the beatin’ path.

Interviewer: No.

AW: Friendships come and go a lot of factors in that.

Interviewer: No, you answered that.

AW: When I worked at Plymouth Plantations, I worked there about 10 years, off and on. There’s many times, I realize like I hope I’m not becoming racist because I realize that all my friends are native.

I’ve been single now four years going on five.

Interviewer: Were you married at all?

AW: No, wasn’t married to any of them. Trying to find out if I could take that step. I think I made the right decision not to, in my opinion. The second relationship I can clearly say that affected it, you know. She, eight years, “I just can’t be your girlfriend for the rest of our lives, that clearly made her treat me different. But, nonetheless, I don’t think I could of just married her. Clearly, I would of made a mistake. Seeing since she ripped my kids from me. My community, my mom, my mom can’t even call and say, “Hey, are my grandkids alive?” She won’t answer her, you know. So, it’s clearly not me. She’s just, in my opinion, a bad person, evil woman. Glad I didn’t marry her.
Interviewer: Were both indigenous or..?

AW: They were native. The second one I couldn’t tell if she was native. She claimed to be. Some of her family, I only met her mom and her grandfather. They technically looked like they could be. The other family members I met, they had married other cultures. They didn’t seem anywhere, any interest in any native culture. Her mom and grandfather kind of showed they physically kind of looked native. She, herself, was dying her skin. She had this tanning lotion you put on your body. It was getting all over white sheets. I confronted her about that. She eventually stopped using that. But, her hair, she dyed it, every time I brought that up, “I can see your roots are changing. I’m not stupid.” She insisted on lying about that throughout our whole relationship. Wasn’t until we’d been separated for well over a year, I definitely asked her, “Why can’t you just be honest with me about that? Again, something that you don’t think is major. That’s a major lie, that’s a major lie. “I have to wait to see when the kids are born that they’ve got light brown hair? You know, that’s not fair to them, me. Come on, you think it’s just a harmless lie?” So again, lies with me, your relationship and friendship with me is numbered, if I find out you’re lying to me. So, yeah, there’s just a lot of challenges with her. But, she was native. She claimed to be native.

I try to find native women. I can’t have a kid questioning who they are. Like, I see a lot of pale kids and dark complexion kids. “I’m native, I’m Wampanoag, I’m Shinnecock Narragansett,” whatever it is. Those kids, they have a hard life. Elizabeth Warren. I’m not trying to defend the woman, by any means. She’s in an awkward situation. That commercial that she put on the air, about you know, “My mom told me this.” You really can’t be proud. I can totally understand that point of view. So, I don’t want to put a kid in that situation. So, that’s why I’m makin’ a conscious decision. Grandparents did it, my parents did it, I have to do it, you know. I have to find a native spouse. Needless to say, its left me single for quite awhile, not a lot of natives around here, within our tribe there’s only so many that I’m not related to. I’ve been there, done that. My first born, the three kids, their mom was Wompanoag, Mashpee, saw her land, saw her community. I know her family’s genealogy. I know she’s Wampanoag. This other woman, when I first met her, “I need to see your land. I need to meet your people, so that I know, god forbid, if we have children. This was way before we had them. I know where their land is. I can bring them and tell them, this was important to you. I can tell them what their culture is.

The Navaho girl that I’ve been seeing, she’s got a lot of beliefs that are very different from ours. If we had kids, I would need to help them understand that. Those things are important. That’s what made her appealing. To wrap up what I’m getting at, When, I meet a girl in a club or pow wow, no matter where I meet a woman, if I’m attracted to her like physically, whatever. If I’m attracted to her, that’s usually my opening line, my pick up line. “So, what are you? What am I looking at here? What nationality are you and if they say Puerto Rican, “So you’re Taino?”
That’s Puerto Rican and they say, “No, I’m Puerto Rican.” Then I have lost interest in that girl already, cause Taino is a tribe, as far as I know, Taino, Carib, Arawac were the tribes that were down there and if you don’t know about that, I’ve already lost interest. That’s just what appeals to me as a person who knows their culture, appreciates it, if not lives it. Those are the things that are attractive to me in friendships or relationships in general.

Interviewer: Where do you feel at ease or with whom? Can you tell me in your past and sequence it up to the present. You’ve probably touched on it already, but, if you can think back.

AW: Mr.’ W’, other teachers, Mr. ‘T’, the gym teacher. He was kind of cool too.

Interviewer: And it was because…

AW: To reflect now, I didn’t even realize until you, it’s kind of coming into focus. When I’m in schools, I always take the time to show my appreciation to any male that I see in that school, usually it’s the principal, maybe it’s the gym teacher or he’s just the custodian. When I see guys in those roles, particularly teaching roles. I always take the time to make the point, “I’m glad you’re here. I don’t know if many people tell you.” Women bus drivers, mothers are getting them off to school. Father is probably at work; probably don’t see him at home, may not get to football or soccer practice. These women get a lot more opportunity to show kids that women care about them. They probably didn’t have nearly as much of a male role, male figured to show kids that males care about them too. “So, I’m glad you’re here, glad you’re doin’ your job. Whether you’re getting paid enough or not, I want you to know, I appreciate it, as a parent, as a fellow man.” Maybe that’s why Mr. ‘T’ stood out. Maybe that’s why Mr. ‘W’ stood out. I don’t know. I didn’t think about it to now. I know it’s something that I’ve noticed since I got older and had kids and cared about them. But, other than that, just people that I feel comfortable with, like I said, culturally I feel comfortable with them. People who are open and honest, people who are open and honest like to the point, if I have a booger hangin’ out of my nose you need to tell me, you know. Little things like that may seem rude at the time. But, no I genuinely appreciate that, you know. I feel comfortable with you because you’re goin’ tell me how it is whether I like it or not.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: Environments, I feel more comfortable in the woods. Square buildings like this, I never feel comfortable in. Outdoors in learning in indigenous schools, a lot of things need to be incorporated, in that I think a lot of people don’t even realize, such as the building itself, the manner in which their schedule is arranged, you know.
I mentioned earlier there’s a gentleman, who is Navaho, I had to do a recent thing this past weekend at a church. They asked me to come share the native spirituality, if you will, with their worship, which made me cringe. I hope you are not too religious. It’s done a lot of things to us here. It’s done a lot of things to other cultures. When I see the start of wars, “You’re goin’ to say Jesus Christ. No, you’re goin’ to say Allah or whatever. I never remember us goin’ to another country and forcin’ people to pray to the creator or worship the sun or whatever. Religion, in my opinion, is a very difficult subject, when it presents itself to handle, particularly, when you are trying to combine the two, like combining fire and ice in my opinion. While I was there, one of the Navaho guys, who was hired, that’s the reason they asked me. They paid for this Navaho guy to come out from Arizona and I’m tryin’ to tell them we have natives who are into their culture here, some even go this church. She felt it was rude. She felt she needed help. She contacted me. Clearly didn’t want any part of the church. I did not want them to experiment with our spirituality, you know. But, at the same rate you have this person who plainly can help you. I didn’t want to judge this gentleman they brought in. Personally, I was offended. “Dude did you even call our tribal council to see how we feel about this before you came? Have you done anything to reach out to the groups that are here? Do you believe there’s native, some of that was already there?” Try not to judge the guy, try to feel, actually things, once I saw the guy, what he was doin’. He wasn’t blending spirituality with theirs; he was kind of tryin’ to help them understand things from a native context or lens.

One of the things he shared with the church was the concept of time in the Navaho way, which is pretty similar in all native traditions, if you ask me. Time on that clock is circular, where as time line is only linear, a week, a weekly schedule. It goes back and forth. According to him, people think I’m rude. This was right in the top of my head because I was rude to you being late today, using that as an example. In college, always thought I was rude. I never understood until I found out the Navaho concept of time. You’re allowed to revisit an area, like the time line that’s history and the past you don’t revisit, that’s the past. Whereas native people, obviously we reflect on our elders and our ancestors and we go back and remember the past. Where the Anglo concept of time, you can’t do that, you know. He said, “What I do, I may show up late, he says, but I’m goin’ to stay until it’s done. Once I’m there, I’m committed. Hopefully, I expressed that. You think I’m rude because I showed up late. Hopefully, you do realize that I stay until the very end to see what we’re workin’ on. I don’t care how many hours we put in. In our way, when we start one, we finish it, you succeed, you know. So that made sense. I always try to iterate that to teachers.

He flushed it out a little better to paint a more vivid picture. But, we think of seasons in a cycle like that. We don’t think of January 1st as the New Year, what the hell. What’s so cataclysmic at that time of year? That this is the change. This is the New Year. Out with old, in with the new, why January 1st? That doesn’t make sense to me. When those trees die, and come back in the
spring, that’s new life. That’s our new year. That makes sense to me. You know what I’m saying?

A square building never made sense to me, you know. I don’t know how much effort was put on the first pilgrims, when they washed up here. But, they were freezin’ to death, their houses were blowin’ down in every hurricane or windstorm. Damp feeling, I mean, all the complaints that visitors ever give us when they come on a damp, cold day. That’s the best time of year to visit that place to see who’s comfortable here, what works, what works. That shit was not workin’ then anymore than it is now. Like I said, we shelter ourselves from the outside world. Already you’re killin’ the environment, suckin’ gas whatever, use to heat this place and to keep it cool in the summer instead of being outside enjoying the weather, first mess up. Then you have to build a square house. What in this frickin’ natural world do you see that is square? I have never seen any bird or animal build a square bird’s nest or dig a hole that’s square, a rabbit, a tunnel, any of it, you know. I don’t see a puddle form in a square. I don’t see the sun or moon goin’ in a square cycle, goin’ around this square earth, like square eyes. What more examples do you need that just normal things are round?

People, the kids they always trip up and I always try to catch them on words, you know. Are you a real Indian?” “Wouldn’t that be from India?” Gets their wheels thinkin’. “Do you live in a normal house or do you still live in wigwam or tee pees?” Those are normal to me. This is not normal to me, wearin’ all these clothes and stuff. A lot of this is not normal to me. So, there’s a lot in schools in general. Things that I feel comfortable, things that I understand, you know, things that make sense to me. Being outdoors, the swamp, I love the swamp. It’s one of the places most people wouldn’t go. People would look at this and say like, “This is hideous.” Whereas this is thriving with life mosquitoes, the little tadpoles that turn into frogs, peepers, you can hear those. There’s a lot of life in there thriving. Having been to deserts. Having been to tribes that are in the plains with nothin’ but prairie grass to stare at your entire life, all four seasons. I’m really glad we have a swamp, you know. That’s where our people went when we hid from the English, when they were tryin’ to kill us, you know. Build a village in the swamp pretty much guarantee they’re not goin’ to find you there. There’s a lot of times I feel at home in the swamp. So, which a lot of people would look at it, “That’s disgusting.” I don’t want to have mosquitoes biting me or black flies or snakes, whatever they’re afraid of goin’ in there.

I go in there to get my cedar to build my lodges. We use a lot of cedar. There’s a lot of reasons I go into the swamp, marsh. Cut catgut tail recently, I felt good in that marsh, cattail towering over me, just in it. I couldn’t see. You could hear the traffic, it was right off the highway, but you couldn’t see it. I like places like that.

I feel comfortable in the desert, when I do go out there in Arizona and New Mexico. I feel like in open space, anywhere I go, Maine. Anywhere I can go that I can hopefully see what my
ancestors once saw. I can’t even tell you. This is a hopeless feeling. I should be able to look out this window and see some sign of my people, my existence our culture. A lot of these plants are European invasive species. When you’re in a cattail marsh and you see phragmite comin’ on one end, phragmite is an European invasive breed that chokes out the area, dominates the area, it chokes out, the birds can’t get through it. It gets so thick; birds can’t get through it, rabbits. Whole environment will be destroyed, just because that’s comin’ in. It’s a European invasive breed. It reminds me of colonization. On the other side, of the marsh, purple loosestrife, purple loosestrife climbin’ up the cattail, chokin’ it and smotherin’ it and pushing it down. You look at it and see it everywhere and wow, so oppressive. Colonization, you know, that’s what I see, when I look out this window, you know. Like it’s every day. So, when I go someplace, when I can be around woods, a good amount of it. That gives me hope there’s still places like that in the world, you know. Like, yeah, those are the places I feel comfortable.

Interviewer: Language, do you speak more than one language?

AW: We just started reviving ours. So, this is the first generation it’s being offered, like to be gotten. When I was growing up, my parents, my dad does a lot of research. He used what words he could; you know, little words, maybe phrases. But, he wasn’t using it frequently enough that we were speaking it. In order to be fluent speaking you need someone to talk to you. Maybe awhile till we get that far. But, the language projects started 10, 15 years ago a woman; ‘JB’ got a vision. She’s become a linguist. She took a course at MIT. She’s not only sharing the language with us, she helps other communities, folks with similar dialects.

Interviewer: She’s sharing?

AW: She’s teaching. She took a course in linguistics there. You break down the whole language and understand it. Other people, my dad kind of pulled from one source. The bible, the first bible that was written here. It was written by a Wampanoag in our language using the Roman alphabet, of course, to spell it. We never spelled our language prior to that. So between misspellings certain things, there was only one source that my dad pulled from. Clearly you’re not goin’ to get a full understanding of the language if that’s all you base your research on. That was mainly what he used and what most people were using until she went to deeds, any pleas to the government that were written by us in our language, the bible itself, a lot of documentation that had our language in it. She combined it all, cross-referenced it. Ultimately, created what we have now, which is pretty close. Some of the elders who remembered the language, you know, maybe they can’t speak it. It’s not exactly what we had, grammatically, pronunciation, I’m sure. You gotta have some flexibility. It’s not goin’ be exactly what it was.

Interviewer: What’s the name of the language?
AW: Wampanoag. She found out its naturally not the “OAG” spelling, which the pilgrims put on it, which makes people want to say Wampan(long o. long a, g). But according to her its Wampanoag, which makes sense, you know Nipmuc. Nanhigganeuck, what my father’s tribe was called before they were called Narragansetts. Narragansett is the place where the Nanhigganeuck live. So, the “uck” sound kinda implies people usually or plural.

Interviewer: So, you are relearning?

AW: I’m learning now what my parents couldn’t; I guess gain when they were younger.

My kids, my son, I just found out, my god, he’s working at Plymouth Plantation with my daughter. He’s now working full time with the language project. So, he’s using more terms and words that I do at my age. So, that’s a great sign of our future. I can spend two hours telling you how proud; I can spend two hours telling you how proud I am of that kid. He’s definitely seeing things that I’ve tried to show him.

Interviewer: How old is he?

AW: He’s 20 now. He’s definitely expressed he shows it’s important to him. He’s doing good things for our tribe not just for himself, not just makin’ me feel comfortable. A lot of people come up to me and tell me how proud they are. He carries himself in a pretty good way. So, but, they need people to learn it. They’re in the process of creating a curriculum to develop our own school. We need funding. We need to get our land into trust. There are a lot of things we still need to get in place.

Interviewer: For the Wampanoag tribe?

AW: Yeah, we have our own health care that we’re suppose to have our own health facility. We have some trailers; they do certain things, kind of like a clinic. I mean, I’ve been to Alaska, some tribes, where they have full-blown hospitals that are completely sponsored by IHS, the Indian Health Service. I mean health care; we have our own place for us. Some tribes I’ve been to, they have their own place. Some things we’re tryin’ to catch up on. We were just recognized in 2007. We just got the green light, now you’re a tribe you can get these things. But, we still have procedures, you know, you’ve got to get your land in trust. If you’ve been reading the newspaper that contract where the state, got re-denied, re-negotiate, that hopefully, that was probably a good thing, there. I heard they were tryin’ to sell away our hunting and fishing rights, which would have pushed me off the deep end. Yeah, hopin’ we can make a better deal, apparently from what I read, the state, the government already saw what we agreed to. Said you’re not going to make
enough money to pay the state. This is not beneficial to you people, which doesn’t give me faith in our leadership.

Their signing away things they shouldn’t be signing away just to get this casino. I know I touched base on this earlier. This casino is scarin’ the shit out of me, driving us away. Like I said, we have enough things drivin’ us away. Like I said, we have enough things drivin’ our kids and our people away from our culture and our belief. This shit is just not helpin’. My father’s tribe owns Foxwoods, the most successful casino in the world, definitely, the most successful indigenous casino in the world. They’re broke right now, first off. That shit might of worked when the economy was good. But this is not that time now. Those people are hurtin’ down there. They’re flippin’ burgers in their own casino right now. They were getting $30,000 dollars a month. That’s when they turned 18. They’re not doin’ anything for the tribe, to give that money out and let your people think that’s possible, it’s not possible now, the economy is not possible. You shouldn’t of done it in the first place, cause those people never learned to respect their culture, cared about, all they cared about was the money.

I don’t want that for our people. I can still gravitate, “Hey let’s go into the swamp,” and they’ll come runnin’, you know. I don’t want to lose that. You’re tellin’ them you can buy whatever. That’s really scary for me. Those things are down the pipeline.

The language is very important. Any person that I’ve talked to is cultural; you’re language, between your language and the land. There’s a lot embedded in your land is like, I need clams. I don’t hunt buffalo. So it dictates who you are as a native person. As far as your language, there’s so many built into it, you know. Like, one of the examples, she explains, I think, “ahke” is land, my land. There’s nothing that says your land, or his land, or her land. You can’t separate yourself from the land. It wasn’t until colonization that they started to find other words being used, which did show. I can be rude, they were havin’ their land being taken from them. I don’t know if your familiar with Hyannis on the cape, but they have the Kettle Ho Restaurant.

Interviewer: I’ve drivin’ through there but I’m not really familiar.

AW: It’s still there. It’s been there for a while. The reason they call it the Kettle Ho Restaurant is because all of Hyanniss was purchased for a kettle and a hoe. Our people, I’m sure, did not realize what you’ve had for thousands of years, your goin’ lose this, what you. It’s not even yours. It was handed down to you and you’re supposed to hand it down to your kids. You’re gonna lose that forever, if you accept this kettle and this ho. I’m sure my people didn’t understand that. They didn’t understand that when the first pilgrims were allowed to stay here, you know.
Like that concept is built into the language, you know, that understanding. You can see it, when you pick apart the language. Like this woman has done. So, language is very important. I try to use what I can with my kids and they’re learning even more. It’s interesting to see where this next generation ends up. Luckily, he’s been getting other peers of his involved. Again, that’s why, I think, I hung out with the kids I hung out with, which probably got me in more trouble than benefited me. But, I was tryin’ to get others involved, tryin’ to get others up to speed.

If you didn’t have native parents, if you didn’t grow up in the swamp, if you didn’t grow up here hearing these stories, whatever, here’s my opportunity to pass it on to you. Hopefully, gain strength in numbers, you know. I need help, it takes a tribe to keep this shit goin’, you know.

My son has started a youth counsel. We didn’t have it. Tribal council is tribal council. You can watch survivor or any of those shows. A tribal council usually makes all the decisions for the people. They didn’t have a youth counsel, where I guess other tribes did. My son found out about that, he formulated a youth counsel, got a group of kids to do it with him. They meet monthly, weekly; I don’t know how often they meet. They make their own decisions for the youth. They’re making good decisions, like positive. They’re tryin’ to be role models and examples in their community if not other communities. It was enough just to see him make that counsel for the community, but in July, we were out in a conference in Phoenix with other youth counsels around the country. He actually got a seat on the national youth counsel of indigenous tribes. So, I mean he’s makin’ huge, everyone says he’s probably gonna be a future chairman.

People said the same about me, though. “You’re gonna be the future chief of this tribe.” I think more people are becoming… I have a feeling I won’t be a chief because people know how I feel about a casino, you know. Like, we can’t have that. It’s not like I’m gonna tell people, “No, you cannot have a casino and I’m telling you, you can’t.” I listen to my people. If they say we’re goin’ have a casino. I say, “Okay, we’re goin’ have a casino. But, we’re goin’ to do it right.” You know, I’ve seen other examples. I’ve traveled enough in Indian country to see what works and what doesn’t. If you’re will to give some, lend an ear to some of my expertise then, yeah, maybe. Although I have to oppose it, because you’re doing it for greed or for whatever reasons you’re doing it.

So, you know, I can hope that my son gains. I can hope our future gains from the language of a lot of things that are goin’ on now that were not there when I was a kid. But unfortunately, they have a lot of distractions, Facebook, Twitter. They have a lot of challenges. Facebook can be used to help you, you know. I gave up face book as of the New Year just because it got overwhelming, you know. You got five thousand friends and that’s the limit. People can’t even friend me anymore because half these people I don’t even know and don’t remember meetin’ them. They’re asking me for stuff, you know. “I was told that I have native ancestry. How do I
“I need an Indian name.” “Can you make me some jewelry?” So many requests every day, had to give it up. But, people loved how I used it, you know. I’m here to help spread education to give a little insight into a world you may not understand, but probably livin’ in. A lot of native people, you know, “Dude, it’s good to see you can carry yourself. Here we’re under fire just for being Indian, you know, Facebook can be a good tool. It’s consumed way too much of my time. It’s like dude, “I’ve got a real life I’ve got to live and focus on. I can’t be bothered. It’s a distraction, nonetheless, but it can be good.

So, a casino can be good. It definitely can be detrimental. I’ve seen it. It definitely can be detrimental. So, language, I don’t know if I see a downside to that one. It’s definitely something that’s here now that I didn’t have as a kid.

Interviewer: Do you find yourself identifying with this new language now or it’s revival?

AW: I haven’t been able to participate in the class. The woman, ‘J’, that I gave you; she was just a little…. Hopefully you realize, this isn’t contradictory, it’s pretty much right on par. I don’t have the chemistry with that woman.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: Maybe, she needs to put on “Leader of the Pack” every morning, I don’t know. But she came in with this Nazi kind of attitude and I just shutdown and couldn’t learn from her.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: She was, “What are you doin’ taking notes? What are you doin’ taking notes? You’re supposed to learn it. You’re supposed to know it.” “If you’re not here later, I’m curious on somethin’, I want to make sure it’s clear. I have my own methods of learning, you know. Like, this is how I learn.”

Interviewer: So, the words that you do know, do you identify with them or do you identify more with English?

AW: I don’t know what you mean by identify.

Interviewer: How do you feel when you speak the words that you know in your language?

AW: I’m glad I know what I know. I’m challenged to even speak it because unfortunately the way this lady’s acted. She’s learning the language herself.
Interviewer: Okay.

AW: Yet she’s already teaching it. Clearly, your research today may not reflect the same as your research tomorrow. When situations like that arose, it made me feel, like not necessarily I’m wasting my time, but, “You don’t know what you’re teaching. Yet, you act like you know everything about it and I’m supposed to already know everything about it. You don’t even know.” Just the attitude, like, there are certain words, well we found out, this is now pronounced this way or we’re goin’ spell this, this way, whatever. I’ve seen enough of those changes, where it’s like, “(A), first off, dude just let them figure this language shit out first, then learn it. Cause you’re gonna learn it, then you’re gonna be taught that you learned it wrong. You need to relearn it.” I would rather just learn it once; if I’m gonna learn it. So, I’ll give you some time. Clearly this language project is still young and getting flush out. Hopefully, when we get to a point when we’re all satisfied with where the language is at, we can all speak it the same without being told, “What I taught you two months ago is not what you’re learning now.”

That just made me impatient. Like I said, when I remember, when she was cracking down on me about takin’ notes. I’m havin’ flashbacks of me bein’ in a room with me father yelling at me. I’m a grown ass man. I don’t like that. That turned me off.

That tour that I mentioned to you, when we went to all different parts of the country with the group that I was touring with, ECHO is the acronym, Education through Cultural and Historic Organizations.

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: Peabody Essex Museum in Salem had asked me to represent this region. New Bedford Waling Museum could of chose a Wampanoag, but instead they chose Portuguese to represent their museum, I guess, every other performer was a native, you know, two tribes from Alaska were represented. There was a native Hawaiian. There was a Mississippi Choctaws because one of the senators, who approved for this, wanted his local tribe represented. Originally it was whoever was whaling. So, Choctaw were part of it. Portuguese maybe, but it was all about whaling, it was all about originally. It was all about cultures, Portuguese and natives, many, many ways. They find those common things, language, song, dance, stories. These were things they were trying to integrate into these performances. They set up until our group got together and formulated what we did. They said it wasn’t working. Like a lot of the people who had observed it before. I heard about the project for about ten years before I got involved. It was the tradesman project and it was focusing on the whaling connection. But, then became ECHO and took on a cultural historic organization learning experience, whatever.
They were trying to mesh these things that sometimes can’t be meshed. Cape Verdian and Portuguese singers singing Farto from another culture overseas. It didn’t really mesh. It was more or less, Alaskan comes out, Hawaiian comes out, you know. It was kind a mish mash, kind a patchwork quilt work, you know.

When we came, they said we’re goin’ to combine all of this into a forty-five minute piece and the Hawaiian guy, who did it, did a fabulous job. He took all of our stories, a natural organic experience to express what we wanted to share. He listened and found a way to weave them all together into one cohesive story of life from the very beginning till the end, you know. You’re young, birth of life, birth of the sun, all of this new life in the very beginnings. As a kid, you’re mischievous and these stories are told and you’re tryin’ things and you’re learning things throughout your life and when you get older, you develop a relationship. You may even marry that person, the bonds of marriage and then death, you know. Forty-five minute piece blew my mind. I’ve been in a lot of performances. I’ve been in a lot of situations, perfect, loved it, everyone loved it. It was a powerful experience. The language, like I said the language emerged, the language that was emerged in Alaskan and Hawaiian. Those were the languages everywhere. Everyone was using it.

When I went to Alaska we were creating the piece in Alaskan the first year. We formulated some of the details the second year. But for the most part, it was the same piece that we created that first year. While we were creating it that first year, we spent ten days, two weeks tryin’ to get to know each other, hear these stories. Throw them out there. Listen to what this guy is telling us about how he’s trying to pull this all together and making it, what it became. When it came for, they have an online learning component to us making these visits, you know. You’re not goin’ fly these people all around the country and drop them in the school and expect the school to understand what these billions of dollars are being sunk into, you know.

Like, there’s a whole curriculum that goes along with this. So, that before we get to the school, you can teach these kids about these cultures and whatever you want to learn about culture itself. Then you can, you know, follow up with a lot of lessons and things being developed while we were developing our story, our performance. When they finally got to the point, we need to put this on the script every word. Up till that point, they had never done a script all those ten years, I had heard about it. They’d never done a script. It’s just, this is what we’re goin’ do, we’re goin’ act it out the best. We’re gonna rehearse, we’re gonna memorize, but there is no script. Now we have a script within that script. We want to have certain vocabulary words from each of these cultures and sent out to the schools.

The girl that done it the year before I got asked to do it, she was like our language president or vice-president. Linguist, ‘J’ created this project, took over her life, got a little overwhelming, or
whatever. She wanted to take a step back and let other people help her and take over more of the prominent roles, I guess. My buddy, ‘H’, was president and I think this girl was vice-president, who had my position on this tour the year before. She was the one who recommended me for it.

I know our language committee has issues about our language being used, you know. Navaho Cotucs would never have won the war if everyone knew their language. So, I can understand why it’s important reasons to keep our language ours. Some of the people that she has taught in her class have gone back to their community and try to teach it to their community, when they really didn’t understand it and basically just stealing all of her work. I can understand the woman’s being adamant about me taking notes. I really don’t know. But, when it got to that issue, when we’re tryin’ to write this script and I’m tryin’ to integrate words that I know, again, I would have had a lot more words to pull from if I’d stuck with her classes. But, she made it so hard for me to learn cause she was so wicked, you know. Like, I had very limited words to even offer these guys. Then spellin’ and all this other shit that I know she’s gonna crack on.

Sure enough, we want to integrate the language and I don’t know, I’ll see what I can do. I emailed my buddy cause he’s my close friend. These folks on this on this project, ‘N’ did it last year. ‘N’ is the girl who did it last year. “‘N’ did it last year and I know you guys have some kind of paper work or something like that.” Actually I don’t even know if I mentioned the paper work protocol. I just basically said to them, “Look this is the situation, I’m here representing my people the best I can. They want our language, which I’m not giving away enough of it that they’re goin’ to learn our language. But, certain words, you know, “thank you”, “hi”, certain words like that. I want to integrate. I want to make sure I’m spelling them right, using them right. Can you help me out with this?”

“Not a problem,” he said. He’s tryin’ to help me out with this. I think somehow she was cc’d on the email. As soon as she got wind of it, I think the other girl backed him up, like uh. “Let’s help out ECHO, I miss bein’ there. It was a fun tour.” As soon as ‘J’ gets a hold of it, “what are you doin’? ‘A’ is no different from anyone else. He knows there’s protocol. He has to get permission from the…and we only meet once a month or biannually. So, he missed his opportunity. He should of done that before he went on tour.” Like, really evil attack on me. “Whoa, can you not see the difficult situation that I’ in already.” I’m a culture that’s been decimated and colonized for last four some odd hundred years. Alaska and Hawaii were pretty much discovered this last century. These people still have way more culture to share than we do and now you’re tellin’ me that I cannot share what little I have to share.” Dam, like, it didn’t hit me till I was on the plane, “You’re gonna be lookin’ like a fool in front of these people. These people are going to have ceremony song, customs, so much and what are you goin’ to offer, dude? You don’t even know shit. Everyone turns to you cause they think you know shit. You’re around people that actually know shit, who have been raised and everyone around them knows everything. It’s probably
gonna show that you really know shit.” But, I mean, it was scary and then on top of it, having her present this problem. “No you should of went through the proper protocol and get the permission.”

“Okay, how do I do that? I’m still in the situation. Do I tell them I’ve got to get off this project? You can’t have Wampanoag’s in here cause I can’t share my culture. Help me out here.” Then of course, mind you, I’m like, taubut, which is “thank you”, “peechkenach” in my farewell to try to help them understand. I’m tryin’ to use these words. The only thing that woman had to say, “Oh, by the way, you misspelled that wrong.” It’s like, okay, you’re not even trying to even understand. You’re not tryin’ to congratulate me for having this great opportunity. You’re not tryin’ to show appreciation for the fact that I’m tryin’ to use the words that you… I didn’t know that “peechkenach”, you know what I’m saying?” When I grew up, that was something that my dad didn’t use. That’s something that she’s developed as a farewell greeting. “You can’t even acknowledge that I’m trying to work with you.” Instead it’s just, “No, you’re doing it wrong.” That’s the only thing I’m getting from you right now.” Its like, “No, I’m not going to help you. No, you shouldn’t be doing this and on top of it, I’m going to criticize you for what you’re tryin’ to do. You’re not even spellin’ it wrong.” I mean, it was such a negative approach that woman had, needless to say, I still can’t participate in her class because of it.

But, like, to wrap up what I’m getting at, the people in Alaska, the whole group somehow became aware of what I was going through, you know. The Alaskans, the Hawaiians, the Choctaws, the Choctaw kid is the linguist for his community. He teaches his language in his community. They’re all looking at me, like, ”Who the hell is this? What is she gaining from this?” you know. “Why can’t she that she’s…? How can she even control the language, your languages?” It evolves, you know, like, like slang. Cause that’s one of the things, like spelling with words, that I know damn well my ancestors didn’t have coffee. They didn’t have coffee. So, “Who are you to say that the only word is what you think should be said and then, how to spell it, we didn’t use the Roman alphabet, lady. Why are you so anal about this, like, come on, you’re takin’ all the fun out of learning, takin’ the freedom of my own expression. You’re takin’ every… You’re taking the language from me. This is your language. This is not our, our language”, you know. The guys were seeing this performance and they were like, “Dude, we feel bad for you.” I remember all, pretty much all of them, like, “Dude, like, wow, I feel bad for your whole community.” I remember some of them saying that, you know. This is really a problem.

If that wasn’t hard enough, I went over, you know, I finally had to print out this form that she’s demanding that I write. I’m in Alaska. It’s not like I can go back and present myself before committee and the girl is defending me, the girl that did it the year before, she was like, “I don’t know why he has to go through this, when I went through all of those procedures for the same
organization for the same project just last year and you approved. So, why are you putting him through this?” You know, like, “Cause, he’s no different.” I think she has a chip against me or something, maybe, she sees me in the media more and she’s tryin’ to be, I don’t know. But, it was clear that she was goin’ out of her way to make me do shit that pretty much everyone felt, “You shouldn’t have to do this.”

When I got this form, I printed it out, signed it and was faxing it back. I remember I was in the office where the fax was and I remember, happened to be lookin’ in a box. I just happened to look and I pick it up and it’s these little pamphlets that I guess, that any random visitor coming into the Alaskan native heritage center, where we were, can pick up if not be handed. I’m flippin’ through it. It’s their flippin’ language and it’s sayings and catch phrases and how to identify things and trees and plants and birds and animals and whole breakdown, mad, extensive vocabulary. They got it in ‘Yup’ik, and Upiak’. There’s so many languages in just Alaskan natives alone and they’ve got it all broken down and very accessible to the average “Joe Shmo’.

I’m like, whoa, the creator works in funny ways, you know, and you’re put in a place that at that time that you need to be there. You’re shown the things that you need to see, May not make sense at the time but all creator’s weird way of workin’ things out, for me to be in that room with information right there available from other people’s languages to random visitors, you know, not native alike. I’m in this situation.

Like, so, I don’t know how much that summarizes… I don’t know how much you wanted to learn about language, it’s a difficult challenge for me personally. That’s the situation that’s goin’ on with our language right now. A lot of people have been goin’ to her classes since day one. I guess they can tolerate the stuff that I’ve seen, that I can’t tolerate. A lot of people have been learning the language and of course, she’s not the only one who is teaching it right now. ‘N’, the one who defended me, I’d love to learn from her, every time I’ve worked with her, performed with her me and stuff like that, she’s personable.

Interviewer: So, you do know some native words?

AW: I’d know more, if I had the right teacher, which goes back to my story. Sorry, I go off on these tandems. I don’t know how much you need and what you’re gonna pull from, but, you know, these are examples.

Interviewer: Your present occupation, how did you decide on it? You probably already touched on this.
AW: Since leaving Boston Children’s Museum, five years at least, at least. I've been self-employed just doing, what I consider cultural education, in various forms, acting, speaking, performing, lot of different ways to teach, pretty much all-cultural education that I’m doing. Throughout that time, being employed by myself, I’ve never had a business card. I pretty much rely; rely, on word of mouth. If you like me, someone is going to find out about me, if you keep talking about me or if you don’t like me. Business has increased enough to sustaining me. I’m not goin’ be rich obviously. I’m still broke and homeless. I need to be available for these opportunities. I feel this is what the creator put me here for. I could clearly do things to improve my clientele, like get a business card, come up with some brochures. One of the hardest things about business cards, how do you classify what you are doing. Some business cards, “We doing plumbing, plastering, pipe fitting, welding.” You know, like, they try to list it all on a card. I would never be able to do that. So, I don’t know what I am or what I’m doing, but I’m doing it.

Interviewer: You’re teaching about your culture?

AW: In various ways, yeah. I don’t get paid for it, but this is what I do. How, did I get here, I think was your question?

Interviewer: How did you decide on what you are doing?

AW: I miss bein’ around my kids, you know. So, when I was younger, I did everything I could from selling weed to anything I could, just be home with my family. When I worked at the Children’s Museum, I narrowed it down to two days a week. When I first started that there, I taken that position while I think was at Plymouth Plantation. Plymouth Plantation had a lot of political stuff that I just didn’t like, you know. Grant it, you have a lot of racist visitors doin’ stuff that pushes your buttons every day. The hierarchy didn’t work for me there. They basically made it clear, “You’re not goin’ anywhere other than where we let you.” When I saw that, I need to look elsewhere. The Children’s Museum presented itself, I was doin’ two days at Plymouth Plantation and two days at the Children’s Museum. One of the reasons that Plantation was confronting me was they found out schools were showing interest in me. “We used to book that school, now they’re booking you. What’s the deal, that’s a conflict of interest?” “Maybe your interest. I have a family to feed and if a school wants me and you’ve been offering the same program since the seventies with your same old slides and same borin’ stuff. They want something new. What’s the problem?” “You, you,” the woman that confronted me, “You of all people should know, my dad did this with me when I was a kid. Who are you to tell me I can’t do what my dad did with me.”

So, that’s what made me a wake up call. You’ve got to find some other work. The Children’s Museum presented itself. The Children’s Museum was great, we want… We do a workshop with
teachers or whatever it was, all these teachers here in this conference room working with us, while I’m on the clock. That woman, my supervisor, would tell them, you want to get “A” in your school. We don’t have an outreach. So you can take it up with him. You can take it up with him. You can find him after. He’ll find a way to book a visit to your school. They were promoting me, you know. These are my own people working with me at Plymouth who don’t want me to do shit, unless I run it by them first. Then there’s these total strangers that want to get me out in the world, as much as possible, a huge difference. Needless to say, I loved the Children’s Museum.

Interviewer: The education?

AW: The only reason I gave up the Children’s Museum was the commute. The commute got to me, you know. I was living in New Bedford, two, three hours in the car everyday each way. That’s like four to six hours of your life your losing. It was only two days a week, but still for me, I don’t understand, I’ve done it, as I mentioned I’ve had eighty-hour jobs. But, I don’t know how anyone can do it for an extended period of time. Like, my family is too important, my life is too important, you know, just sitting in a car that long. It’s not…it’s not conducive for me. So, ah, when they finally asked, “Dude, you’re startin’ to show up late or whatever.” “I’m not showing up late. I’ve got an extensive commute here. Things go wrong, you know, I’ve been here five years. You can count on one hand how many times I’ve been late.” It’s more than I can say about Plymouth. Plymouth I was late every day. I just didn’t take the job serious. I took my job serious and when they made me feel that I wasn’t, that’s when I had to tell them, “Dude, I’m goin’ to resign if you feel that way.”

Luckily, clientele had built up, been on my own ever since. So, ah, it’s not easy. I definitely can promote myself; my dad thinks that’s my biggest shortcoming in life. “You’re not promoting yourself.” I don’t want to be that guy, it’s not humble, you know. It’s, it’s…I need it to feed to my family, but I don’t know, that’s the reason I haven’t…I just don’t publicize what I do. I mean, people find out about me, however they find out about me.

“Creator, I hope I’m doing what you want me to do.”

Like, when I did the last movie I did, We Shall Remain, I was asked to be King Philip. I don’t know if you’ve heard of him. He’s the guy, we had the war here, the colonists got a little out of hand.

Interviewer: You were in that documentary?
AW: I had to portray King Philip. He’s my hero. I don’t know if you know about the history, ‘A’ was the guy, who kept fightin’ after King Philip’s head was cut off and marched into Plymouth Colony. ‘A’ surrendered the Wampan belts that act ended King Philip’s war. Needless to say King Philip, you know, his hero, screw Columbus. King Philip is a hero, you know. When I was asked to portray him, it was like the production company fired the woman who approached my dad. My dad told me about the project years before casting or anything because she was asking him, she was asking the right questions. She was listening. He felt comfortable with her to proceed with the project. He said he’s never felt that way about anyone else, who asked him about that topic. So, I felt comfortable workin’ with her. When they fired her obviously I got uncomfortable, our language committee was uncomfortable. All our elders that were goin’ to be participating, we had a little meeting around a table like this at ‘J’s’ house. We’re all expressin’ our concerns because of our experiences in the past. Dealing with this is a very important issue for us. If you’re not gonna tell it right, you’re not gonna tell it. I’m sick of people thinkin’ we’re hugging pilgrims and shit, you know. You need to tell the truth. Needless to say, they didn’t come to a agreement. My whole tribe backed out. The language committee backed out.

If you watch We Shall Remain, particularly that episode about King Philip, the first words you’re gonna see before even the cast is told before the title of the film, I think even, says the words in this film are Nipmuc. We have our own language. They couldn’t use it because PBS couldn’t agree that they’re gonna do things the way we wanted them to do them. That’s not necessarily, we’re gonna tell you our history, just let this woman, this woman had it, you know. Like we were comfortable working with her. “We don’t know who you are. I personally don’t like you because you have a British accent lady, no offense. But, you’re trying to tell history through native eyes and you’re a British chick with a British accent, who’s fired the one woman my father felt comfortable workin’ with,” you know what I’m sayin? Then they hired Lone Wolf Productions, I remember that meeting and I remember when she said, Lone Wolf Productions, I jumped down her throat. “I’ve worked with them on two projects. I refuse to have a third project.”

So, like if you see me in movies, I think critically about what I’m bein’ involved in. I don’t want to be involved in Hollywood stereotypes. I don’t want to be involved in misinformation. That was a challenge, you know, me not bein’ asked to portray my hero. I’m bein’ asked to proceed once my community backs out. If I back out, I know damn well, they’re goin’ to do whatever the hell they please with our history, our culture, representing us. I was really upset when I saw some of the short actors. Like dude, “That ain’t no Wampanoag. You’re too short.” We’re very tall people, just little things like that. I knew it would even be worse if I wasn’t there. But, to this day, I gotta ask, I hope I’m doin’ what he put me here to do. I’m not here to be famous and rich, you know that. A lot of people were like. “Dude, why don’t you pursue acting?”
That was literally one of my most challenging times in life you know. Like, the whole shoot, you know, you should’ve just been thrilled. Like, I’m on a motion picture set here. I’m workin’ with, I’m workin’ with one of the, what was one of the biggest names in native film directing, you know. The director ‘C’, I was like, “Dude, if I could get with him. He’ll have me in …” He was such a pompous asshole. He was adopted and it shows, you know. He was raised in the white man’s ways. A total disregard for our culture, like, ”Dude, you’re representing another culture, grant it you may be native, but if you know anything about it, you know we’re different.” Either way, I go to Navajo country. I go wherever I’m goin’, Hawaii and all these other places, if I need a leader, I want to be a leader and I want to show respect. I want to give them somethin’ from our culture, you know. Especially, if I’m here to portray this story, I want to talk to you, “Like, are you comfortable with what I’m doin’? As a native director, I want to make sure we’re doin’ the right thing with your people,”

That’s how I would of approached it. But he don’t give a shit about that. He’s like ahh, “ ‘W’ doesn’t care about his culture. All he cares about is his next Robert Redford film that he’s be workin’ on.” I’m like, “I don’t know if ‘W’ does, maybe you do.

Cause he put me in a room one day and he’s like, “Look at your, look at your audition. It’s not stella, you know. It’s like these other…”, and he shows me these other people’s auditions. He’s like, “They own that role. They own it.” He’s like, you know, “You got to own it. You’ve got to be convinced this is you.” He was like, “Tell me ‘A’, when it’s all said and done. Do you want to be known as a native actor or do want to be known as an actor?” I saw where he was goin’, like I assume the right answer he was looking for was, “I want to be known as an actor.” My answer to him was, “Dude, I want to be known as ‘A’. I don’t want to be known as an actor cause he, he, he patted himself on the back, tooted his own horn. When he was like, “I started out makin’ native movies, but I’m makin’ CSI episodes, now I’m doin’ this and doin’ that.” He’s so cocky. He doesn’t realize dude, he’s pissin’ me off. “I used to buy your movies; I used to like your movies. Now you’re tellin’ me, I don’t give a shit about you and your native movies. I’m with white people now. I made it in Hollywood. Like, is that what you’re sayin’?” He really pissed, he pissed me off, grant it he totally, the day we went to meet each other on the set, the gopher, whoever, was tryin’ to get his attention, “Hey, ‘C’ I want you to meet somebody. He turned around; he looked at me and walked away.

I heard during the audition, as soon as I was done reading my lines, as soon as I walked out the door, my sister was in there on the audition, she said, as soon as I shut the door. “Ahh, we can’t get him. We got to get my actors. He’s too tall.” He obviously didn’t know his history. He obviously didn’t appreciate me to begin with and probably against his will, he had to work with me. Then he’s tryin’ to sit down. He’s tryin’ to smile. He’s showin’ me these auditions. “’A’, do
you want to be known as an actor?” It’s like, dude, you’re smilin’ in my face. Clearly, you don’t
even remember walkin’ away from me. I didn’t forget that.” I didn’t want to bring it up because
we still have to get through this project together. But, it was a challenge. I remember callin’ my
dad during that shoot. I was like, “Dad, don’t want to be here, don’t want do this.” He was like,
“Why, what’s the problem?” It’s like, “Dude, they’re butcherin’ the story. A lot of the shit that
they’re doin’.” She’s tryin’ to ask me questions. She should’ve of been sitting down with my
elders straightenin’ it out. You know, like, “I’m an actor. I’m not your linguist. I’m not you’re
storyteller and you’re tryin’ to pull all this from me because you think I’m stupid and I’m gonna
give it to you. But, I know, you’ve insulted my people and that’s why you don’t have that. You
would’ve had that. It won’t be from me. I’m paid to act, to read lines and look good on camera.
I’m not a consultant and if I am, you’re gonna pay the consultant fees.”

There some things about music that they were gonna put in. I was like, “You can’t do that,
dude.” They were like, “Well, what can we put in?” I was like, “Are you gonna pay me for this.
Cause otherwise, I’m not stupid.” You know, it was a challenge. I told my father, “Dude, I want
to walk off this set, so they have to scrap every piece of film they took this week and hopefully,
cut the whole role out. He’s like, “What’s, what’s so bad? Are they tellin’ this part of the story?”
“No, dad.” “Did they tell this?” “No, dad.” “Well, what story are they tellin’? It doesn’t sound
like King Philip story.” He said, “Son, regardless of how bad, let’s try and get through it and
we’ll find out how bad it is when it airs.” That’s the only reason I went on with that project.
Everyone thinks I should of gave it my all. I did not act. I was doin’ everything to make horrible
performance. I wanted the whole thing to flop. Like I said, I wanted to walk off the set.

It was literally one of the best roles I could’ve ever had, probably the best opportunity I ever had
and it was a challenge. I got to be true to what I am, you know. Like, I probably could print out
business cards and people like you can find me a lot easier, I don’t know. I’m contending with it.
Like I said, it’s not getting me anywhere as far as financially. I’m hopin’ things bein’ done the
way they’re meant to be, you know.

Interviewer: My last question, how did your educational experiences affect you as the person you
are today?

AW: Which ones, the one’s in school or the everyday.

Interviewer: Your experiences in a non-indigenous school. How did they affect you? So, you’re
out today teaching about your culture.

AW: Algebra, I can apply in some ways. Problem solving, you look at an equation from one way
or another and figure it out. Algebra, I kind of liked it because of that. When it got to the point in
high school, really, really, trigonometry and shit, like really, “What everyday use am I gonna have for this?” Whereas algebra and certain things, English, reading. I was, even in elementary school, they introduced like Texas Instruments, when you had to do ‘run, program, control. You had to type stuff and you had to program. You didn’t just click with a mouse. There was no mouse. I remember that, when it first started. I remember when computers first started and I remember, this is goin’ to take over the world and I saw it at a very young age. I wanted to be involved in computers at a young age.

Interviewer: How do you think…?

AW: When I got into high school…?

Interviewer: Okay.

AW: I took key boarding because I wanted to type and that’s part of learning how to do computing. I can type now. Algebra. I can figure out problems. There are certain things from school that I’ve benefited from, like I said English and certain things. Um, social studies, history a lot of subject matter. Again, social studies and history kind of only told from an Anglo perspective. So, kind of hard to describe, it was very boring, you know. Like, pretty much every history teacher I ever had, as you can see, I love history. I kind of live it, you know. It’s kind of whom I am, very intriguing. But, every teacher I remember, maybe it was just their colonial Anglo point of view, I don’t know. But I remember, I never really cared for social studies or history growing up. Most of the stuff they taught me, I purposely blotted out.

When you got your father tellin’ you every day, just about every day, you know. “You know what they’re teachin’ you is crap.” Even now as an adult, tryin’ to tell teachers that have been teachin’ this stuff.

Interviewer: So, you think that has affected the person you are today?

AW: Definitely. Some subject matter have stuck and benefited me in certain ways. Some just totally disappeared and I did my best to forget about them, I don’t know. I don’t feel they’ve benefited me. Some things have benefited me that I don’t take into consideration. But, honestly most of where I’ve been, gone or headed has been from me learning from life experiences, which is in many ways how our culture was always taught, you know. Lead by example in the community, observe as a child, encouraged to do things, experiment as a child. Their reverse psychology worked on our children back then, you know. Like, every time a kid comes up to his father, “Hey, hey, I wanna help. I wanna help.” “Oh, you want to help? Go play.” The kid’s goin’ to get sick of playin’, you know. So, like those things, I think…
Interviewer: So, you were not taught about your culture in social studies either?

AW: I was told I didn’t exist in social studies. When the topic came up, Thanksgiving, Wampanoag, whatever or whatever it was like…I don’t know if the term Wampanoag was being used. I was in a Rhode Island school. So, I don’t think the term Wampanoag was bein’ used. Just Indians who met pilgrims, “I know where it happened.” I know it was my ancestors. I know it was the Wampanoag nation, because my mom… We were living in Rhode Island and were spending very limited time goin’ to visit my grandparents on the weekend. If we were lucky, spend a week in the summer at the most. But, I knew there was a community there. I knew there were Wampanoags, I wasn’t the last one and I’m sittin’ in the classroom and get the courage to raise my hand. They had some turkey, they got diseased and then they vanished, you know. They didn’t talk about King Philip’s War, that I see some schools at least introducing now. “No, it wasn’t always happy. It wasn’t cut and dry. They came, they saw, they disappeared, you know. It was like…and they have an identity and it’s Wampanoag. These things were not bein’ taught. I remember raisin’ my hand and tellin’ my teacher, no there’s Wampanoags. I remember, he literally, he felt challenged; I’m sure as a teacher. I don’t think any teacher wants to be corrected in front of their class. There may be some training, “Under no circumstances can you be corrected in your own classroom by a student,” you know. He was pretty adamant about, “No you’re not right.” I think, I got detention or something for tellin’ him, “I’m a Wampanoag,” and standing by my word. “You’re a trouble maker, get out of here, go to the office.” I remember that.

So, yeah, history and social studies, nope, I don’t think I learned anything from all those teachers throughout all those years. Clearly, I know a lot of history. Math, English, like I said typing and certain other subject matters, I had an interest then. I knew there was something that I could apply later. Something I try keep applying now. Some people text like this (looking at hands) I try without my eyes. I don’t know if you were trained how to do that, they always teach to work off the ‘g’ and the ‘h’, you know. Those things benefited me. So, some things stuck, some things benefited.

Interviewer: Some things did, some things didn’t?

AW: As far as percentages, I don’t even know if it was more or less, academics, you know whatever. If I was in a public school with more natives around, that would have been a different factor. If those natives weren’t pickin’ on me, if the teachers at least showed support, sympathy, you know. I definitely think school; I think I could of succeeded. I think I could of graduated, you know. My kids clearly did, my kids had peers though, my kids, uhh, my some may even had a leadership role while he was still in school. I don’t know exactly how to… what an example of
that is. But I remember when he came to live with me, havin’ lived with his mom, bein’ in a
different school district; I enrolled him in our Mashpee district. I remember the guy, they
probably blew’ smoke up my ass, cause they don’t want me in the school.

Our Mashpee School has problems. I think that is very important for your research. All the
parents feel that our kids are targeted and they’re made to fail. You’ve got to understand most of
the selectman, a lot of the teachers, they’re developers. That’s the only way to survive livin’ on
the cape and particularly in Mashpee. There’s not a lot of jobs, heavily based on tourism, as you
know on the cape period. You’re a contractor. You’re either building a house, buying the land.
You’re puttin’ in the plumbing. You have somethin’ to do with destroyin’ our land, our
community. Specifically, if you live Mashpee there, your work is there, outside of teaching. So, I
mean, it’s clear with our selectman, you know, our zoning laws and all the shit they let slide by.
All we care about is makin’ money off the land.

When our kids are comin’ home. “We’re bein’ picked on. We’re bein’ attacked.“ Some of them
are bein’ pushed through. A lot of kids, “I don’t care if you’re learnin’.” Once you’re out of
school, where just gonna put you through the motions, you’re not our problem.” They’re not
learnin’. We have an ‘Indian Ed’; I don’t know how many schools do. But, whenever it’s
acknowledged, whenever there’s a population in the school that’s acknowledged as a native
population, even if it’s one or two kids, you’re entitled to ‘Indian Ed’ money and it’s granted to
you according to the amount of students you have there claimin’ to have native heritage. Clearly,
a native community like Mashpee gets a lot of that money. We have our own ‘Indian Ed’
department, had its own classroom in the high school. It services all the schools, elementary,
middle, and high school. It should be able to help other schools. Like, when I was in high school,
we had to go to Falmouth High because Mashpee didn’t have its own high school, kind of like
CHERAHO, you know. It should be able to help that whole region.

So, Barnstable schools were where my kids were going before they transferred to Mashpee,
when moved with me, you know. It should of have been helping them, in my opinion. But, those
schools either have it or they don’t and most of them didn’t. Mashpee schools has an Indian Ed.
They’re not supposed to be tutors. They’re not supposed to be handling disciplinary action.
They’re kind of there just to, we don’t have an emergent school where they’re learning their
culture all the time. Their culture does need to be shared, it’s important. Um, “If you can help
them with homework, that’s great. But, that’s not necessarily why we’re given you that money.”
Um, we want our kids to succeed though, so, yeah, we would help them with homework. But,
what we saw a lot of the teachers, “Oh, your kid’s actin’ up in class, go down to the Indian Ed
room.” “This is a disciplinary situation that you’re supposed to be trained to deal with as a
teacher. If this kid acts up in school, do you send him home to his mom? No, you find a way to
deal with that little white kid.” You know what I’m sayin’? Where this kid, “You’re a problem, go down and let your people handle it.” You know what I’m sayin’?

That’s what was happening. That’s when they reached out to me. “Like, dude we’re getting’ so many kids sent down here. The kids aren’t goin’ to school. They’re not goin’ to their classrooms. They’re usin’ us like it’s a free day off, whatever. It’s not our job to teach this stuff. We’re not the teachers.” You know, like it’s a big problem. If everyone could realize, it’s the system, the school system. They want our kids to fail. They don’t want to deal with our kids. They don’t want to take the time to deal with our kids. If it was their kid, think if it was your own child in that classroom. You know damn well, you would do everything humanly possible, “Can you help? Can you get it? What do I have to do to appeal to you to get you to get it?” No, not with our kids, just go down to Indian Ed, you know.

So, I know there is a problem with the Mashpee school system. Of all the schools that I visit, at the point that I can sustain myself financially visiting schools, I’ve never been hired by Mashpee School system, not the high school, not the elementary, not the middle. We performed at the high school because ECHO went there, you know. Like, when they asked me, like, “Where can we our performance in your region so your people can see it?” “Well, the high school would be a great place. They have a nice auditorium. We can probably get some of the other kids from the other schools to come over on the day that we show up.” So, they got something because I proposed it and it’s free to them. It’s not a dime out of their pocket or nothin’.

It costs money. I’m not gonna give you my time. I mean this is different. But, I’m not gonna drive all the way up somewhere and give you my time and my culture for nothing, you know. I charged these people. I charged a pretty… I know what Plymouth was chargin’ when they were sending me out for a shady program. I consider my program… my father insists I get what I’m worth and he knows, “You know you’re offerin’ more than Plymouth. You should be chargin’ more than Plymouth. So, it is what it is and I got to charge. “If that’s why you’re not hirin’ me because you don’t want to spend the money.

You’ve got a great population. You don’t want to spend the money. You have, you have the largest native population in the commonwealth, Mashpee, the largest population of native people in the entire commonwealth of Massachusetts. There’s Nipmuc, there’s some people claimin’ Massachusetts, these are different nations in the commonwealth. Wampanoag is not the only tribe or nation. Within Wampanoag, you have communities, like Aquinnah over on the island. You have the Herring Pond people I was sweatin’ with last night. These are different communities within the same Wampanoag nation, of that entire nation, Mashpee is the largest and they have never asked me to come into their schools. They know what I’m doin’. The one time I did go to a Mashpee school, was because the teacher was at the Boston Children’s
Museum. She saw me at a workshop, like who ever saw me at Bourne, word of mouth; she wanted me to come down to her school. That was kind of her doin’ it. She probably paid me out of her own pocket because that’s her. She was the rare teacher that we need more of in Mashpee.

Honestly, like, these kids are forced to learn the same shit every other kid in the state is. The state curriculum framework requires mentioning, right, you know that DOE website, you can pull it up yourself. Third grade, social studies, history, curriculum should, is required to teach about Wampanoags, specifically about our leadership at the time of the colonization, our relationship with the land, our relationship with the colony, certain things, literally specifically mentioning, Wampanoag, which keeps me in business.

Mashpee has that same standard. It’s a framework requirement of the state of Massachusetts. They’re teachin’ these kids about tee pees, about buffalo, about everything, whatever they can pull from Hollywood and or whatever other crap they’re tryin’ to feed our kids. Our kids aren’t even stupid, they’re like, “I hang out with ‘A’, I know...” It’s got to be challengin’ for them. “You’re tryin’ to teach me about my culture. Clearly, you don’t...and you’re livin’ here.” Like, I don’t know how a kid feels. Like, I can reflect back how I felt when I raised my hand, “I’m a Wampanoag.” “No, you’re not, get out of the class. You’re in detention.” I can feel what our kids are probably goin’ through and some of the stuff I’ve seen. It’s like, wooh, how do you even tell the kid, let alone the parent. Like, “Wow, really? They’re teachin’ you...this is what they’re teachin’ you?

Yeah, there’s a big problem in Mashpee schools, a big problem. There’s a big problem in many public schools, but I mean considerin’ it’s a native community. The largest, probably even New England, our own commonwealth, but, wow, they don’t, they’re not tryin’ to put any effort, into makin’ our kids fail, you know. Like, it’s obvious.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you for all your information. I’m really honored that you shared.

**Participant #3: LS’s Journey**

Interviewer: We’ll start out with some background information, your age?

LS: I’m 46.

Interviewer: You’re education?

LS: That’s not a simple question, my ending education, my old education?
Interviewer: Maybe we can start with your elementary, junior high and high school, and college.

LS: Do you want to know the names?

Interviewer: We can start off, yeah.

LS: Let’s see, that’s a tricky one. I started off in Exeter; actually it was in West Greenich. I went to pre-school there. I can’t quite remember the name. I know where it is located and, um. Then I went to Lynamm Elementary School, which is in Exeter school district, Exeter, West Greenich. Then um, I went through pretty much all the Exeter school system. But, my mom, we moved quite a bit in and out of places as my mom was young and would get different internship type jobs. So for one season, I lived in Connecticut for like three quarters of a school year, like third grade. Then in 4th grade, I lived in Massachusetts and that was quite an adventure story, um in Jamaica Plain’s area, 4th grade part of the year. Then from 5th grade to 8th grade, I went back to Exeter district and I was at Metcap. Then, I went to high school at CHERAHO Regional School district.

I lived in Rockville, which was part of the town of Hopkinton. The, I went to college. I went a summer semester right after I graduated at Colorado College, part of Tribes Institute, which was Technology, Resources in Business, Engineering, and Sciences. Then, I went to Simons College, which was my official college for going off to college in Boston, stories to tell about that. Then, I transferred out. I went to CCRI for a semester. Then, I went to URI. I finally graduated from URI with Bachelors in Education. Then, I eventually went back and got my Masters at the University of New England at Biddeford, Maine.

Interviewer: How about languages? How many languages do you speak?

LS: English, according to my college levels, I’m fluent in Spanish, which is not true. If you don’t use it, you lose it. I have some levels of fluency in Narragansett.

Interviewer: Okay. What is your first educational experience that you can remember and describe?

LS: That’s an odd question? Um, I’m trying to think. Things that pop out, you know, stories that pop out. Um, I remember 3rd grade in particular, its not that I don’t remember. Actually. Let me backup. The thing I remember about 1st grade, I had a teacher, her name was Miss ‘S’ in Exeter. The thing that I remember, it’s not so much I remember the classes or going or anything, but, the stories around it that persisted after that. One of things, was that I always got on my report card, I was doing commendable all year long, commendable, commendable, commendable, commendable. When the
end of the year came, I was in first pre-primer and my mother was furious because, “How can you be doing commendable and be in first pre-primer?” My mother was frustrated, “When she went to school, she already knew at least the basics and didn’t really progress,” seeing how I was in the first pre-primer the whole entire year. My mother got me a tutor that summer, um and um, that helped get me back on track and the frustration was from her perspective and as my family perceived it, is that I was the only brown face in the whole entire school and I was still stuck in first pre-primer and never was not asked to do anything more that was one of the questions my mother asked, “Well, did you ever ask her to do anything other than what you asked her to do?” the teacher’s answer was, “No” at the time. I did what she asked me to do. I got commendables on my report card and yeah, I hadn’t been out of the first pre-primer. So that was just a frustration to my mother.

My mother, I have to say was my biggest educational advocate and without her, I wouldn’t be where I am, because, she always pushed, um. She dropped out of school, had me young, didn’t finish high school. Did go back and got her GED, did go to community college. Eventually, six months after I graduated from college, she graduated from college. She knew the importance of it, but her life path took her a little longer to get there, um. My grandfather had gone to college. He’d gone to Bacone College, which is an Indian college out in Oklahoma. He was the first east coast Indian to do that, you know. The world is different now. Kids in the east go to Indian colleges all over the east country. Our cousin’s child that is in Kansas is going to Haskell. But, in those days there weren’t as many colleges that were focus on native youth and their college. There weren’t as many native programs, even colleges, you know, at Dartmouth, Harvard, places like that now have Indian programs that help native Indian students through their programs anyway. So, that’s probably my first memory, the sort of first grade story.

My second sort of pronounced memory is in third grade. I had Mrs. “C”, who was my first minority teacher I ever had, one of the very few. I had less than a handful in my whole entire career as a student. Um, I had a family member, who is Narragansett Blackfoot Indian and he was married to someone Chinese. He was going to the Brown School of Design. He lived right near here. My mom, who is similarly aged as her cousin, would visit and go over there. But, because his wife was Chinese we would often eat with chopsticks. So, in third grade in Exeter, which was a very non-diverse, like I said, I was pretty much the only person of color and I didn’t have anybody that was of color in my class until I went and lived that one year in Massachusetts, or maybe in Connecticut. Connecticut is kind of a blur. I don’t really remember that as well for some reason. But in Massachusetts, I’ll tell you sort of that story later. But, until then, I hadn’t had any the whole career of being in the Exeter district. I never had anyone of color in my classes. Um, then when I was in high school, a couple of times I had a cousin in the class. That was it that was people of color, an ethnicity. Um, but usually in the Exeter school district, if there
was someone in the building of color, it was usually my cousin. That was just a sprinkle in the whole district.

So anyhow, in third grade with Mrs. ‘C’, I just remembered this is a highlight because I felt very proud of myself because Mrs. ‘C’, being Chinese, she wanted to give a little cultural. So, we did a whole unit about China and Chinese and what it is to be Chinese American and so forth. She did a special day, where she cooked egg foo young and we had white rice. Everyone had to eat it with chopsticks. Of course, I was the only one in the class that had ever had an experience where I’ve eaten with chopsticks before. So, I was like, the hero of the day because I was culturally adept at eating with chopsticks. So, those were my two big memories that I can remember. One was a negative and one was positive.

Interviewer: Okay, all right. So from there, we can build. Tell me about the rest of your educational experiences in sequence.

LS: Sure, okay. So, 4rth grade would be next, I guess. My mom got a job at the Boston Children’s Museum in their native studies program. Um, she was a native intern and they were sort of cutting edge in the museum field, working in the native field collections, really looking at it from a native perspective. Unbeknownst to my mother, me being in 4rth grade, how old are you in 4rth grade? Nine maybe, she’s being fairly young, a young mother in her early twenties and off doing this internship and so forth. My mother and father got divorced when I was two. So, it was basically, me and my mom for the longest time and all our family. Don’t get me wrong, native families were very well connected, but in the sense of your immediate family.

Um, we went to Massachusetts and we went to Jamaica Plains and trusting things. I share with you about her being young because she wasn’t aware of it and we talk of it now. She wasn’t aware of what was going on in the city. She was aware of this opportunity, this native connected job, this museum learning experience, all those kinds of things. But, she was not aware unbeknownst of her and I was they were integrating the city. It was seventy-four or seventy-five or six school year. I think something like that. They were integrating the city and busing kids all around to integrate the city. I didn’t know that. I didn’t know that event then. I knew that later as we were discussing it. It sort of impacted my life. It was a very negative experience.

I went to Agassiz School and literally had pretty much no friends at that school because everybody was segregating themselves because it was being forced integration. So there were the kids that were African American black as we were calling them in those days. Then or the other side there was the Caucasian American or white. Then, I was an odd ball. I didn’t fit either group. They knew I didn’t fit. Whether I knew it or not, I didn’t fit in any of the groups. There
was one girl I was sort of friends with by default and she was of mixed race. She was biracial and we bung out a couple of times. Other than that, I really didn’t have any friends there. It was a very isolated experience. But, the positive experience of that place was that my mother rented a basement apartment from a family. They were Caucasian. I became the best of friends with the girl that was my age. There were two daughters. One was particularly my age; her name was ‘K’. Actually, even after we moved away for years, like through high school, we kept in contact. Then as adults and so forth, we lost contact, college life, and so forth. But, that was a positive experience. But, she wasn’t going to the local school. Her parents were sending her to a private school to avoid this whole integration. Although, they were not, I think, I think it was more of a class thing rather than a racial thing for them because here they were renting to an indigenous family, friends with and we really got along well. I think, they even just more worried about the violence and whatever that could happen in the local school, because of everything that was going on. I’m just making assumptions there. But, that was my feeling. So that was a positive experience, so when I was home, I had this friend.

Not only that though, my mom worked at the Children’s Museum, when it was still in Jamaica Plains, of course. Because, now it’s in downtown Boston if you’re not familiar. I used to go right from school to there. So, my after school hours, I was like a hero. I got to put an apron on. I had a nametag. I was a little helper. I got to, you know, hold boa constrictors and feed iguanas, teach kids how to play in grandma’s attic, and share about native culture in the native culture exhibits and be a big cheese, So, in that regard it helped my self-esteem. Again, it was my mother working in this native connected environment and that was positive for your self-image for an indigenous child, and all those kinds of things.

Um, then, I came back in 5th grade to Exeter. The first thing that happened is they put you in one class and they did this testing, you know. Like, the state’s standardized testing, very shortly after they decided after they did that, that I didn’t do well enough instead of being in the ‘A’ class that my mother insisted I be in. They put me in the ‘B’ class. My mother fought that, and wouldn’t let it happen. They put me back in the’ A’ class. She’s like, up till now she always go A’s and B’s, there’s no reason to drop to a lower level and they did level, you were A, B. C, or not leveled. It was very blatant in those days, very much tracked. Um, I remember taking the standardized test and I remember the teacher saying, “It wasn’t important and it didn’t affect your grade. Where, now they are a little more stringent in how they word those kinds of tests.

But, I remember distinctly because it was such a big deal, my mother had to fight so hard to get me back in the ‘A’ level. It’s very much in my mind. Um, I remember taking the test, people were getting done faster than I did or were turning the pages faster. So after awhile, I stopped reading the information and started filling in the dots and turning the pages because I felt I was taking too long. Of course, you don’t understand, the person that was flipping all the pages may
not have known anything and wasn’t reading it at all. It could have been, they were really super smart reader and did a great job or they could’ve not had a clue. But, I was reacting to the fact, the people around me were flipping the pages, as I perceived was too fast and so I started filling in the dots without reading the information (laughter).

So, that was not helpful, I didn’t feel I was a super strong reader at that point. Um, I think it might come from that whole first experience in 1st grade. But, then also that zone between 1st grade and sort of 5th grade, we moved a couple of times and when you do that, you go, like, it wasn’t like you started in September. When I moved to Massachusetts and moved to Connecticut for those jobs that my mom had, it’s not like you moved in September and left in June. I always was, you started here and went a month or two in and then the move happened. You’re walking to these classes and you’re off kilter because you’re not….

They’re trying to standardized education to the extreme, right now. So, that you can go from district to district and you’re still talking about the same thing. I don’t know if I agree with that. But, in the sense of having been a student, sometimes they were teaching one thing completely different. Let’s say in math and then I’d go to the other thing and I’d show up in the middle of a fractions unit. But, I hadn’t gotten to that yet at the school I was at and so I’m, catching that in the middle of the unit. So, I’m missing all the background information. So that was a little bit tumultuous as far as that was concerned as catching on to things.

From the 5th grade on to the 8th grade, I stayed in one place and that made a big difference. The impacts, my mother did fight for me to be back in the ‘A’ level classroom and I stayed in that all the rest of my career in Exeter.

In 5th grade, I had Mrs. ‘B’, loved her. I don’t know though what I learned. I don’t remember her for the education. Of course, education was happening and we were learning things. But, what I loved about Mrs. B, she was very good for people’s self-esteem. She was very loving, and caring, and nurturing. She made every student feel they were the best student in the world and that they were special in some kind of way.

I remember when I was student teaching, I came back and taught in Exeter and walked through the door and here comes Mrs. ‘B’, “Oh, ‘L’, ta da, ta da, ta da.” She was that kind of person. She always made you feel wonderful and I truly believed she did that for everybody. Um, as opposed to the kind of teachers who had favorites? I feel she just had that way. She also had a lot of pizzazz. She was very smartly dressed every day. She always wore a different outfit. We believed she never wore the same thing twice. Whether that was true or not or she had a good way of moving things around so we were unaware. But, as kids we were very in awe of her.
In 6th grade, um, I don’t really have any distinct memories. I feel like I moved along and you know. I had nice teachers. I had friends. I definitely had formed in 5th and 6th grades, I had this one friend who was in Exeter, the whole time, her name is ‘S’. We were friends forever since kindergarten, all through that time on and off, when I was moving around. We always came back to being friends. From the 5th grade on we were the like the best of friends and frankly we still know each other and see each other regularly and are best of friends till this day. Um, in the 6th grade, it became a threesome; another girl named ‘P’ became part of our core network of friends. They were both non-native, like I said; I was one of the few kids of color, period, in the school. Interesting thing, um, when… well let me finish this educational standpoint and I’ll go into the social. 6th grade, then we went to 7th grade.

7th grade was an interesting year. My teacher that stands out the most to me was Mrs. ‘E’; I had lots of teachers that I liked. I didn’t dislike anybody really. But, Mrs. ‘E’, I think, was pivoted cause that was the year I owned being a reader and a writer. Um, she made us write and read and we kept journals. We wrote autobiographies, which I still have. Matter of fact when I was teaching, when I founded the Nuweetoum School here and I was teaching native kids, I brought my autobiography out. Now of course, we’re living in a day where there is no such thing as a computer. You had to write everything so you had to write it ten times before it was good enough to get handed in. I had pictures and things that happened in our lives. I had a cousin who died when I was six, five or six, and that was very traumatic of course. We talked about family vacations and things like that. But, it was very empowering to write an autobiography, you know.

As a kid, you don’t think about that. But, later when I was reflecting on it, you know. The things she did, the amount of writing, the amount of reading that we did and the fact she let you have some choices. I remember I read “Amityville Horror”. I don’t like horror to this day. But, I read it as a free choice thing at that particular time. It was probably my curb and I was probably scared to death. Um, but, she let you have those kinds of choices in your reading and in your writing. You wrote and you read a lot. I remember feeling at some point and I’m sure she was saying, “You are a reader, you are a writer.” I think I have some of my proactive way in my teaching because of that experience about really empowered people in her classroom to believe. I was getting ‘A’s’ and ‘B’s’ all along, but I didn’t believe I was a reader and writer till 7th grade. Like, I didn’t feel empowered by it. I didn’t feel like I was skilled at it. I didn’t feel I was there. She was the one with my own mother, who was a torture. I love her dearly.

But, all summer long I read. Um, I remember camping at campgrounds. We’d have a friend ‘S’ with me. I always got to bring a friend. My sister is thirteen years younger than me, my mom remarried. I have another sister. So, there was a big gap. So, all that time before I had a sister,
even when she was little, I always got to bring a friend with me because I was an only, a friend, a
cousin, somebody. So, ‘S’ would be with me and I remember reading “The Good Earth”, while
we were camping and being so frustrated because ‘S’ didn’t have to read. My mom said, “She’s
not my child. You’re my child and you’re reading.” (Laughter). So, I’d be reading. Then, I was
even more annoyed because the book was really good. So, once you get into it, it becomes this
really good book, which I was annoyed that I liked it, annoyed that I had to read it, and so forth.
But, my mother was a great advocate for my education. So, I don’t ever want to forget that, even
with these impacts, she was the constant that made sure I succeeded.

In 8th grade, I had great teachers and fun times, you know. We had world events and things that
happen, you know, blizzard of ’78 happened, I think I was either in the 7th or 8th grade, I think 7th
grade, but, whatever, things like that happened in the world. But, the thing that was interesting
on the social dynamic about school is when you’re native or minority and you’re going to a
school that is very much not diverse, you (pause) very much fit in until in jr. high the dynamics
start to change and mind you, I’m doing this in the ‘70’s, you know. We’ve come off the Civil
Rights. There’s all this clashing of culture for the good, the bad, and the ugly. There’s all this
change happening and (pause) in rural Exeter it isn’t happening as rapidly as everywhere else. I
had lots of really good friends even through jr. high. I had lots of friends. But, the tricky part
came, when the dynamics change. When you sort of get to 7th and 8th grade and you’re trying out
“dating” and you know in Jr. High it’s that puffy love dating. I’m going out with you and you’re
going out with me and we hold hands at school and send notes across the room and act silly all
day. Um, it’s that kind of dynamic, but, I think, it impacts your experience when you’re the only
person of color there, because you don’t get that same dynamic because on the opposite person’s
part there’s risk if they date you. There’s a risk because you’re not of the norm. So, there was
this conflict that was going on. But, like I said, guys and girls, I had lots of friends. I went to lots
of parties. I went to lots of things. But, that dynamic starts to shift there and you’re in that zone,
where you don’t really fit.

Um, through that experience from 5th to 8th grade, despite the fact I had lots of friends and I had a
core group of girlfriends. Um, I was called every name in the book, um, everything from the ’n’
word, which is infamous for anybody of color. Um, to redskin, to red stick, black stick, um, like,
I said the ’n’ any kind of derogatory racial word they could come up with. Negative hoots and
you know, hollers, that people do that represents “Indianness”, a, in a negative way, um.

Interviewer: This was jr. high?

LS: Actually, I kind of got that all through sort of again, on and off with different people. You
just provoke someone. Kids get in a fight and that’s the thing that comes to, any negative words
they can come up with, um, you know in between 5th and 8th grade and on and off during that
time. You end up with a core group of kids. But, I remember there was a boy who moved in from like the city, like Warwick or someplace to Exeter and then, I went through that same thing with him. Then, eventually, he came around and we were sort of fiends.

But, it’s like, um, you’re always different, you always don’t fit. You’re always trying to blend. So, you spend a lot of your time trying to smooth it out, just so that you can survive. Um, I remember my cousin, ‘H’, she came to the school, she was a little older. She only came for a half of year and you know, the times were tumultuous, you know ’75 to like ’79. There’s a lot of remnants of the Civil rights going on, there was an American Indian movement going on. She was quite a bit older than me. She was like four years older. So, when she came into the school, maybe, I was in 5th or 6th grade and she was in 8th grade or something and I remember this distinctly and she wore a patch on her jeans that said red power or something like that. I don’t know, someone made a comment and she got into an argument with them, ending up going to the principle and getting suspended from school because it all got blown out of proportion. But, she was in an age, when she felt a little more empowered to say something.

I sort of at an age where I didn’t know what to say, you know. I didn’t know how to do, you know. I didn’t know how to do so. My mode to try to survive that was to try to blend. So, you know, I tended to have a lot of girlfriends and that sort of brought the group sort of involved, you know, guys and girls and friends. I had lot of friends, friends that were guys that were there, that we talked to, you know, that you were friends with. But it never went to the next space because it’s culturally wasn’t, wasn’t commonplace, in that world, you know, biracial families and things like that. It was just a new thing that was causing lots of controversy and it was lots of media and negatives and all those kinds of things.

Interesting thing, along the same time period 5th to 8th grade, I went to a camp. They had contacted my mom, the tribe. They were looking for kids that were Native American to go to this international camp. The location that I was going to was Freedom, Hew Hampshire. They had kids from all over the world. I’m still connected to that and have kids that come from other countries stay with us before they go to camp. Now, so mo my kids are exposed to that. My daughter might go, she’s still thinking about it. Anyhow, it was an international camp of kids from all over the world. Sweden, Switzerland. Again, my mother impacting my life in a positive direction because I was again empowered, cause instead of being pretty much an area that has one group of people and you’re the odd ball. I was now in a group of people who were very diverse, you know, culturally diverse, you know. Language diverse, you know the experience diverse from all over the world. I went the summer of 5th grade, no summer of 4th grade, 5th, 6th, and 7th. The third year, I went to Switzerland and then, I also went to France. I spent four weeks at camp in Switzerland and then went to France.
I think those impacts of my mother gave me a bigger global view and a sense of self, because when you’re exposed to all that diversity, then, it puts a respect on to your own self. Because, when you are learning about other people and you’re accepting them and they’re accepting you for their diverse differences. It gives you back a sense of who you are. Where I think even though I was surviving and in some ways thriving. I mean in some networks of 5th through 8th grade experience, I had positive experiences but, I also had a lot of negative thrown in there for not fitting and being the one of color in those classes in with those kids.

So, those camp experiences kind of broadened my horizons and gave me other options and opportunities and experiences that gave me that sense of self of who I am. Of course, all through all of this, we’re doing cultural things within our native community, going to ceremonies, going to the pow wows, going to, you know, gatherings at our tribe within our family, being part of the Tomaquag Museum, for example. My mother was the director in the early 70’s. My grandparents have been instrumental since the 60’s. We kind of grew up doing native programming through the museum. I can remember doing it when I was like 4 going out, 4 or 5 years old and doing dance programs and singing songs, saying poems, things of that nature. Then, I can remember doing my first presentation by myself I was… I did it for a church group; friend’s family asked me to do it for their church group. That was the first time I talked about myself as an indigenous person on my own.

So, those things are empowering. But, a lot of times I would compartmentalize, you didn’t really go to school and talk all about what you did on the weekend with your family, finger weaving or beading, going to the pow wow, going to the reservation, going to the social or eating venison or rabbit. Doing the things that were culturally, collecting cranberries. The things you did as a family, as a native community. I didn’t talk about those at school. Schools weren’t very progressive. It wasn’t until later, that they started looking at cultural diversity and doing cultural awareness kinds of teaching and activities that would expose people, you know, Mrs. ‘C’ was like an odd ball thing in Exeter. She was there that one-year. I don’t know if it was a teacher exchange or what. But, she was kind of there one year and then gone. I never saw her again after that 3rd grade year. That’s a kid’s perspective. Maybe she was there and I didn’t know it, I don’t know. But, that’s how I perceived it. From this on in Exeter, I never had any other teachers of color.

I did mention when I was in Massachusetts I had an African American teacher, Mr. ‘T’, I think his name was. Again, I don’t have a negative memory of him, but I don’t have a super positive memory either. I just have a sort of it was there memory. He was probably stressed out of his mind. There was a lot going on.
Um, I don’t remember my teacher at all from Connecticut. The thing I remember in Connecticut in 3rd grade is where we lived. We lived near an aunt and uncle of mine. It was a great aunt and uncle, my grandmother’s sister and her husband. My uncle great-uncle ’W’, he was, he’s retired now. He was a dentist. They were fairly affluent as a minority couple if you want to call it that. Um, but, we lived relatively close to them. I remember going down a ways, away from sort of where they lived. I had a friend, I guess from school, because I don’t know wherever else I would of met her. But, whatever, I went down to her house and she was extraordinarily poor, extraordinarily poor, dirt floor poor. Um, I remember telling my mother; but see even though I was an only and my mom was sort of a single parent, I never felt super poor (laugh). We may have been, it turns out we probably were.

But, my grandparents owned a restaurant and we lived in and around, my grandparents owned this property. They live in this, what this building used to be there house. Where the museum is now was a gift shop and the other building that held the school for, you know, seven years was the restaurant. So, I grew up in a restaurant family. So, my grandparents lived in this huge house, you know. I never felt poor. We often lived either with them on an occasion or lived across the way. We lived in a farmhouse over there, a farmhouse down the road. Um, but I didn’t have the conception when I was little that we weren’t wealthy, not that I thought we were the Vanderbilts, but I didn’t feel poor even though my mom, as a single mom, probably was. As it turns out, when I think, I used to get free lunch in Exeter (laugh) at least through 5th and 6th grade. I don’t remember 8th grade so much. But, any way I used to get free lunch and but, a lot of my friends did too that were from farm families and such. So, it didn’t occur to me that I was poor at that time, um, because of that. Again, the restaurant, my grandparents owning it and again it was a Native American restaurant. I was young and I used to race anybody down through the hose, through the living room and so forth into the gift shop to be the one to sell things to people. So, I was good, you know, at practical math, you know, because I was always doing taxes and adding and good at talking to people and selling people things. Then as I got older, I worked in the restaurant. First, you did the dishes. I caught on really quickly, if you were well behaved you got out in the front room. So, I would be the hostess or the bus girl. And then I eventually, I waitressed at a young age cause I was family. I was waitressing, probably before it was technically legal to waitress.

So, I had all those experiences. Again, positive and empowering and native, you know. We were serving native food, johnnycakes, and succotash, and of course, all the seafood and venison, elk, and moose and bear, you know. All these unique things that make us special, make the restaurant and so forth. Those things were all empowering. I might of got lost in my conversation. I don’t know where I was going.
Interviewer: That’s fine. Actually, you touched on the next set of questions, which was the social. You talked about where you went to school, what kind of student you were. So you spoke about those. You described your friends.

LS: I didn’t go to high school; I guess is where I forgot to go.

Interviewer: Yes.

LS: High school, again, I went to a different high school at the time Exeter, West Greenwich didn’t have a high school. So, kids either went to North Kingstown or they went to CHERAHO. At that point in time, my parents bought a property, my mom; my stepfather bought a property in Rockville. That was actually my mom’s first piece of property that she purchased. Um, so, I moved and went to CHERAHO. Um, of course, then, I felt poor cause that house was an old mill house and had lots of work to be done (laughter). I remember telling my grandmother I didn’t want to live there. Um, it’s funny, my sister, thirteen years later, she has nothing but fond memories of it. I had a different as a tween teen. I was like thirteen when we moved there, you know. You’re at that point where you’re trying to impress your friends. You can’t impress your friends with a mill house. Nonetheless, that’s where we ended up living.

I move and went to CHERAHO, I had lots of good experiences at CHERAHO, in that, I had friends. I was a good student. I pretty much took the ‘A’ level class for the most part, except for some math and some science. I played sports at my mother’s encouragement. So, I played basketball and volleyball throughout my high school career (pause). I had some great teachers. I think of Mrs. ‘B’ at the time, her name had changed now. But, um, had her for science, my freshman year. She was awesome. A negative experience when I got to that next year where you’d be taking chemistry, um, um, we had a doctor, he was a doctor, you know. He was gong to teach it. I remember we went into the first class and he gave his lecture cause he’s a doctor, you know. He’s thinking he’s teaching college instead of high school. He was very much in the lecture zone. I remember going home with the first set of homework, mind you, I’ve already told you I’m a good student and I always was that kid who went home and did their work, you know. Past 3rd grade or 4th grade, I pretty much did what I was supposed to do, got it done, without a whole lot of coaxing from the parents and being a parent now, sometimes you have to do lots of coaxing. I was just one of those kids that you did it. If I need help, I asked for it. So, I went home and I was trying to do this chemistry assignment. I hadn’t a clue what I was supposed to do. I asked my mom and my stepfather, who was extraordinarily smart, if they could help me figure it out. They both tried to tackle it. Neither one could figure out this assignment, what we were supposed to do. So, I was also kind of naive and I look at the world ever to this day, very rosy colored glasses as positives. Looking at positives, rather than the negatives, even when there are negatives.
But, I get into school and have this study hall that’s before my chemistry class and the doctor is in the class. So, I get all excited, I can go ask him and maybe he can help me and I can understand this. So, I go over to him and um, he proceeds to give me a riddle, cause, basically I figured out very quickly, he didn’t believe I even tried to do the homework. So, he gives me this riddle that makes absolutely no sense, what so ever. The homework makes no sense at all and neither does this riddle. I marched right out of there and into the guidance counselor’s office and I switched from the ‘A’ level class to the ’B’ level class, cause, I felt that he was going to fail me. Now, whether that he was just pompous and condescending in general or whether that was a racial thing, again, the only brown person in the classroom. I pretty much spent my life that way being the only. Um, I felt the way he talked to me was really rude and condescending and frankly obnoxious. It could have been a feminine thing. It could have been a cultural thing. It could of just been that he thought he was too good to be teaching high school science and had this attitude, I don’t know. But, it was negative. So, I left that class, you know.

Lots of good teachers, lots of okay teachers, you went along and did your thing. Um, coaches, my basketball coach was wonderful. My volleyball coach was not so wonderful. He spent a lot of time making all of us young ladies feel bad about ourselves. Unless you were blonde, blue eyed and very frilly, he paid no attention to you and was very negative to you. Um, I’ll give you an example of that, myself and a non-minority girlfriend, who was not that stereotype, very blonde, blue-eyed. I’m not making fun of people who are blonde and blue-eyed. It was just what he was attracted to. So, if you were the cheerleader, blonde, blue-eyed, he’d toss nerf balls to you when you leaned a four armed pass to play volleyball, If you were not that, he stuck you in a corner and drilled them at you with the regular volleyball as hard as he could and then yelled at you when you couldn’t receive serve. That’s a negative, which kind of re-enforces the negative for someone like myself who doesn’t fit the media norm of what’s beautiful or the media norm of what’s acceptable or what people want to look like, you know. Um, we all wanted our hairdo the Farrah Faucett thing, not happening (laughter), you know. That’s what I’m saying, you know, you don’t always fit the norm and that’s an impact negatively on yourself-concept.

Um, I don’t really remember having overt negative things said to me in high school I was kind of a floater, had lots of friends. But, didn’t fit into a particular click. Um, high school is very clicky. I kind of floated. I didn’t necessarily fit a place. But I had lots of friends. I had, you know, distinct really close friends to make a positive experience. Um, I was involved in sports. I was on the yearbook. I was on class council, you know. Everyone sort of knew me. Um, I think I got most talkative in high school (laughter), you know. So, when you get one of those, a lot of people know you because it’s about knowing a lot of people. Um, but as an adult, when I look back, I always say to myself, it wasn’t an empowering circumstance. There was nothing there that let me be proud of myself as an indigenous person. Um, really never anything in my
educational experience was there anything empowering about who I was as an indigenous person. That I got from all my family, you know, my community experiences.

But, I look at my own children and I think I was so glad they had some experiences that were empowering for who they are as indigenous people within their education because I found the Nuweetooun School and they went to that school. I was in school, for my kids to go to the, um, like Met School, my boys that are in high school, or have graduated now from high school to have that opportunity to go someplace that’s more diverse. Where as part of their curriculum, they were able to do projects and programs that were empowering that were connected to their community and culture. So, like, my eldest son, who is now in college. He did internships at the Narragansett Indian Tribe Natural Resource Department in Environmental Police. He did internships here at the Tomaquag Museum working with our curator on the Neolithics, which are stone points, arrow points and so forth. He also did an internship here working with a college intern that we had that was creating a fishing camp, building a traditional home, making the arbor, digging a dugout, canoe making, nets and tools, and traditional things. Then, he worked with an environmental artist, who was Cuban American. Again it’s diverse, the diversity. She was an environmental artist and so he was working sculpting and making things that was connected to who he was. But, working with this diverse person. You can’t get that in South County. Even at the local high school that went to now, it’s not very diverse. I think the whole population of diversity that would be every diversity other than Caucasian is less than 1% of the district. So, you just don’t have it. That is very difficult for a sense of self, a sense of identity, and a sense of well-being of who you are. Like, I like to call it, “Feeling good in your own skin.”

When I went to CHERAHO, there were some native kids, but because I was a really strong student because of my mother’s push and influence, the only class that I had a native in was a Spanish class and that was a cousin of mine. All the rest I had either no one of color at all or on one native. I think in all my regular classes I don’t remember having anybody of color other than myself in, um, except for the Spanish class and then, I think, I had a study hall that has another, you know, a couple, cause study halls are bigger, a couple of kids that I knew and hung out with on occasion. So, that’s difficult. So, you sort of end up in a funny zone too because you sometimes get the negativity from your own community. Now you’re in an upper scalar of academics and you’re not doing the same thing and hanging out and doing the same kinds of things their doing because you’re in this set of classes and you’ve got these set of people that you are going year by year with because it’s very tracked and it was in those days, very tracked by ability level. So, you weren’t in those classes with people who might have been from your community, but were not in those same classes. Um, so then you have a disconnect there academically speaking and socially because how you’re not with them. You know how school is; you’re with the same people over and over and over again. So, guess what, you’re with who you’re with and you’re going to those who’s there where you are in the classes that you are. So,
that’s a little bit of a disconnect that way. Um, then in the other way around, you’re also again, the one minority person in that mix.

Again, I had a lot of friends, but on the social level not a super lot of dating. I did date a few native people in high school, a couple. I wasn’t a big dater. Mostly just had lots of friends. The dating experience took off more in college, not that I didn’t date at all. It wasn’t a focus. I think it was uncomfortable for me. So, just kind of avoided it. So, I just didn’t.

So, I guess, a couple of things in high school is the guidance counselors were not informed. I’m not saying they did anything maliciously. But, they’re not informed about what is available for native students out there. In my experience and a lot of people come to me because I’m an educator and this is a repeated experience that they feel their guidance counselors just don’t know what’s there. Like, I have talked to some of the local schools and shared some things with guidance departments. Whether, they’ve taken it in to heart, don’t know. But there’s a lot of programs that are targeted to support native students in mainstream schools as well as all these native schools across the country of which I know nothing about, when I was trying to go to college in ’84-’84 My mother knew we all knew, I was going to college. That was the goal, but what was ideal and what we actually did, are not necessarily true, you know.

Computers were very novice at the time. I remember putting in things, like; I took a lot of foreign language in high school from that camp influence of meeting all those different people. I took Spanish, and Latin, and French, and Vietnamese even as a super elective, elective. I was the only one in that class. Um, it was fun and I found really just that languages were unique and different and so forth. I’m not, fluent in any of them, not even close, but was really intrigued about them.

So, I kind of went to my guidance counselor and said, “What can I do with that?” So, we came up with International Relations. Unfortunately, for me, no one told me that international relations isn’t just about the languages and having relationships. It was about politics, which if anyone looks at my high school transcripts would know I took the barest, minimum histories, despite, the fact that I now work in a native museum. Native history is something different for me because I live it. But, history in general, especially in those days, I didn’t have any appreciation for. Of course, as an adult, you get the full picture. You understand it better so it means more. In those days, I hadn’t taken the, but the barest minimum histories and certainly wasn’t interested at all in Political Science. So, when I went to Simmons that was under that concept, while I got there, tested out in Spanish and French at the exact same level. That was a bear because the textbook they used was exactly the same. I took the Spanish first and the French class was second. I kept putting Spanish on my French test. So, if I got a ‘B’ on my Spanish test, I’d get a ‘C’ on the French test because I didn’t know the French and I kept putting Spanish in it. You take the test
on the same day, an hour and a half later and I couldn’t get my brain to transfer quick enough. So, I ended up not continuing with the French and took Spanish till I was “fluent”. Um, I certainly couldn’t save myself if I had to in Spanish. Probably, if I went someplace and that was all around in the synapses there, it probably would come back.

But, anyhow, thinking about it now, when I’m advocating for native community members that are trying to get their kids into college. I really advocate differently than what happened to me. I kind of, as far as I’m concerned, pulled Simmons College out a hat. I might of well have. I never visited, I think, because native communities or minority communities that don’t have resources. It never even, you’re like the first, grant it I, my grandfather went, my mom dabbled in community colleges. I was like, out of all my cousins, on actually both sides, all my first cousins; I’m the only one with a degree. My sister has a degree; my mother now has a degree. I shouldn’t say now, she’s had it for twenty something years. But, you know, she got it after I got mine. So, we’re blazing new trails. So to speak, so we didn’t know how to do the process, you know.

So, the way people, I remember working in Newport and one of my colleagues, her daughter was in high school, I think she was junior and they were preparing for college. Every vacation they went on that year was based on a place where she wanted to go to college. So, they picked their vacation spots around. I mean, they went to California, Florida, and D.C., you know. Those were the places I remember, I remember being shocked at that notion. Like, I went sight unseen. I showed up at Simmons, had no idea how affluent Simmons was, no idea that you were going to have the Brazilian ambassador’s daughter in your dorm. Her idea of taking classes was to take foreign languages that she already spoke fluently, but had never taken as a class. So, she could take them as classes cause she didn’t have any of them on transcripts. So, she basically didn’t have to go to class, because she knew it fluently already. She was basically floating through till she married someone wealthy. Um, of course that’s an extreme example, but nonetheless, it was what was in my dorm.

Your thinking, you’re just barely scrapping by, you know. I was working, playing a sport plus gong to school, while I was at Simmons. Um, if I didn’t, didn’t have money, you know. My parents just didn’t have that kind of resource to send you money. So, you worked. I played volleyball at Simmons, I had to juggle. I had student leans up the kazoo, um, plus scholarships and all those kinds of things that got me there. Of course, I was diverse. It gave them a different number. I won’t regret it. It wasn’t a wise choice. But, I don’t regret it because it was an experience. I learned from it. It had positive things.

One of my best friends to this day was my roommate from college. She was Greek American, we had a diversity. We had a fit with each other cause we were unique in that. Her sister was quite a bit younger than her just like mine was when we had sibling weekend. I had a five year
old up and she had a seven year old up and the rest of them have their teenage siblings from high school out and doing things on the college level, you know. We had things in common and got along famously and are still best of friends till this day, twenty some odd years later. So, I won’t regret it, but when I look at what would empower your identity, as an indigenous person that place certainly wasn’t it. That was a negative experience as far as self-concept and self-worth except I had these great friends in volleyball you know, whatever.

I very quickly realized I didn’t want to be international relations major. So, then I kind of floundered at what I wanted to be. After going 2 years at Simmons and going completely broke. We decided, that I couldn’t afford to stay there. I transferred out. I went to CCRI for one semester, didn’t quite get my paper work in for URI and then I transferred to URI after that. But, URI was a different experience. I mean, the Simmons experience was an on campus life experience, which was great, you know. You’re living in the city. You’re going to frat parties. You’re hanging out with your friends. You’re playing volleyball, you’re going to class, you’re doing the college life thing. I remembered being there, so, I was what empowered. I remember I had my regalia, which is my traditional clothes there and I was beading it in my dorm room. I also remember being in my dorm room and putting on like, pow wow tapes and dancing and things like that.

Interviewer: This is at Simmons?

LS: So, having a roommate that was diverse, I felt comfortable enough. We became such fast friends. I felt comfortable enough sharing with her about my culture. It’s not that the school shared anything about my culture. But, I had that within myself at that point, through my family and my experiences. I think, because she was diverse enough that I sharing some diversity with her. Of course, I was going to pow wows during the summer and so forth. When I first went to school, I went home the first three or four weekends, I went to pow wows. I remember beading there. When I transferred out, I kind of had a different experience. I didn’t live on campus at URI. For CCRI, I was living at home. But then, you know, your college life and you are used to being independent in Boston. So, my friend ‘S’, who I mentioned to you earlier, we ended up getting an apartment down the line. They call it at URI.

You lived down in Narragansett somewhere. Um, we had a third roommate, who was not a friend of ours. We just rented that other room to help afford the bills. Um, we lived there and commuted to school. Of course, we were friends forever. So, we just stayed friends and so forth, but of course on the social front, even while I was at Simmons. When I was at Simmons, I got asked out a lot by people who were Hispanic, you know. When you’re native, you kind of have that look, if they don’t know what you are. Um, “Maybe she’s Spanish.” A lot of people talk to me fast in Spanish, which I can’t speak.
Um, then, I also started dating people from my native community, you know, dated guys from my own tribe. Came up to Simmons and went to Valentine balls with me and things like that. Again, Simmons was not diverse; again, see what I’m saying? I kept ending up in places that were not diverse. Cause you were in the city, there was diversity around you at some of the other schools and places that we became friends with people. When I came home and went to URI, I was dating native people from the native communities here. I married someone from Narragansett, my husband, ‘R’ was also drilled into my head, marry native and drill it into my own kids’ heads because not that I don’t think other people aren’t worthy people. You loose culture when you marry out, you know. That’s the reality. It’s hard when you’re mixing cultures. Our idea of mixing culture, “Yeah, okay, marry someone native.” My older son is dating someone who is South American native. She’s Mayan. So, that’s very diverse. There’s still something g consistent about having that indigenous culture. That’s important. So, my family always stressed that to me and I stress it to my kids.

Um. However within our families, we have lots of diversity. I have an uncle who married someone German. So, I have cousins who are half Narragansett, half German um, across our family, there’s the gamut. I have a niece and nephew, by brother-in-law’s children. He’s Narragansett, with two Narragansett parents but he has children who are Cambodian on their mother’s side. So, there’s diversity, happening. It’s not that we’re against it in the sense of, you know, prejudice against other people. I think as native people, we’re actually open and loving, inclusive of people. However, it is difficult not impossible, but difficult sometimes when there’s diversity to keep the native culture going and that is an important part of who we are. So, you know, if one generation marries out and then other generation of that family marries out, before you know it you’re totally disconnected to their indigenous culture and tradition. That’s an important part for me. So, I certainly encourage my children when they are of marrying age, knock on wood, my son’s only eighteen. I’m not ready for him to be married but in the future to have that indigenous connection.

Interviewer: Okay, just a couple more questions. You probably touched on this a little bit. Where did you feel at ease or identify with?

LS: I think I’m a very friendly person. So, I manage to find niches everywhere. But, if you notice, if I look back, each of those places, I ended up with sort of a best friend I think an elder mine always said, “You can have lots of friends, but you’re not gong to have many best friends.” Those are those people that you truly have a deep relationship with. So, I think, I’m very friendly in general and know lots of people. But, it’s really those true best friends, no matter the ethnicity. I have best friends within the native community for sure. I have these non-standing non-native friends. Now, can they totally understand everything about my “nativeness”? No. As an adult, I
see that and I don't expect that. But, probably my truest closest people are my family. But, when I say family, that’s extended family. I mean, in the native community, we’re very close with our third cousins, you know, our third cousins are like first cousins to other folks. We’re around our family all the time with family. I can’t look at…. I watch funny show on TV and they’re very disconnected to their family or show like “Friends”. Where their family is somewhere out in the background and that’s not their day to day. That’s just the opposite for us. Um, my family and that extended family, I mean, I stop by and see my grandmother virtually everyday. I see aunts and uncles, father-in-law, mother-in-law, sisters and brothers-in-laws, and siblings and what have you, nieces and nephew, definitely, if not daily, on a weekly.

I talk to my own mother daily, sometimes several times a day (laugh). So, I just can’t even imagine, that’s not something that’s part of our culture. I can’t imagine not having those people with me. I really can’t imagine, moving far away and staying far away. But, sometimes we move. Um, I was actually born, even though both my parents are from RI. I was born in Spokane Washington because my father was in the air force and so my mother and my father were out at the Fairchild Air Force Base and I was born at the Sacred Heart Hospital, don’t remember it. We moved back when I was two. But, I look at it, they didn’t quit make it. They got divorced shortly after I was two. I think being away was probably why they didn’t make it because we’re very strong in family. They were way out there without that support system, which I think is really, really important. Yeah, and they were young (laugher). My mom had me young. So, I think between all that makes that difficult.

So, I guess the places I feel um, truly at home here in this environment. Um, my grandparents’ restaurant used to be here. Dovecrest was here. I grew up in this place, so working here at this museum is very at home for me, this landscape. I feel very at home on our reservation and on our lands. Um, on the reservation, the church grounds where we hold our annual August meeting pow wow at our community center with all those.

I walk in there, everyone knows me, I know everybody. I feel very at home in those places. You know. Our property that we own originally is a butting the reservation land. So, the back of our property abuts the reservation property. My sister and mother live up the street a little way. This way a minute walk (laugh) if you hustle. My husband ‘s first cousin ‘F’ and his wife and kids live even less of a distance that way. So, we have family right there. My in-laws live four mile down the road. On top of my in-laws living down the road that way, there’s at least ten to twelve family members that live in that same four mile distance down the road. So, lots of family, lots of people come together all the time for the good and the sad, you know.

Interviewer: All right. You spoke about language. So, what language do you identify with?
LS: Through colonization, we’re sort of forced to speak English; it’s the way it is. However, our tradition, which I’m very involved, my mother teaches the language classes currently at the tribe. I’m on the language committee. It’s so important. I’ve taught language with my mother and with my sister. Then, I had the Nuweetooun School on my own to the youth of the community. Language is very important. Our language is part of who we are. Um, it’s just as much apart of who we are as this landscape that we’re from. We’re indigenous because of where we are from all our life ways, the foods we eat, the materials that we use for traditional objects in this modern world, which we call art and is our traditional historical world, which were necessities, baskets, and matt, and our home. All of those things stem from the land. So, does our language. Our language is based out of who we are as indigenous people. There are things you can’t say in English, that you can say in Narragansett and mean something. You can’t translate it properly in English. So, part of who we are our vitality, a part of our essence of who we are is from that language. So, it’s important for us to speak our language and to um and to a pray in our language and have that connection to the language. So, I feel it’s important for us to continue that. I try as much as I can to expose my children to the language and to do as much to help push it forward. Luckily, for us in this modern world, there are technologies that we’re using to help us increase the fluency of the language throughout the community.

We did a survey a couple of years ago about language, our language, and asking people within our tribe whether they felt it was important to know the language. Whether they wanted to learn it. Everyone felt it was extremely important. Everyone wanted to be fluent in the language. The difficulty is going to class, you know. People live all over the place. People in Rhode Island, you how RI islanders are, we think going to Providence is an ordeal. So, therefore, if you live in Providence, which was our landscape, we think of it as the city now and what are they doing native in the city. It wasn’t always the city; our villages were all over this landscape that is now known as RI. People in our tribe live all over this landscape that’s now known as RI, if not beyond those borders. So, that means on a Monday night it might not be convenient for them to take themselves and their family down to the reservation in Charlestown and go to language class or on a Wednesday afternoon or a Saturday or whenever. There’s all kinds of things buying for our time, kids, and sports, and activities, and pow wows, and events, and family life and birthday parties and things of those nature that eat-up our time. So, we’re using technology to help us, so some of the things can be sent out as MP3’s on the internet and recording it, videotaping it, so that later points in time, hopefully we can do more with technology and have a platform where tribal members can go and access these things to enhance their knowledge. So, they don’t actually have to go to class, but they can be part of that class so maybe there’s the twenty people who actually go to the class are but being videotaped doing the activities and lessons and the language, so someone at home can do the same thing and participate in it.
Interviewer: All right. You talked about your present occupation. Can you tell me how your educational experiences affected you as a person today and how that affected you in your present occupation?

LS: Sure, well, I have to again, go back to my mother. My mother was the constant that was ensuring that I had a quality education. Whenever the school wasn’t doing the job, she was doing the job on the home front with a tutor or whatever. So, she was the number one key to my success educationally. The impact comes from that because her ability to push forth my educational agenda, while maintaining my cultural agenda and identity, and self-worth, and self-concept has led me where I am. I graduated from URI and became a teacher and I taught in the Newport Public Schools for twelve years, which was very empowering because it was a very diverse community. I’m happy I ended up in a diverse community. Some people always said to me, “You drive all the way to Newport?” I loved that because I worked with native kids, Hispanic kids, Asian kids from all different walks of life. That was empowering as an educator to know that I impacted their lives in some way. Some, you know that overly impacted because you meet up with them as adults and they come up to you as adults and hug you and thank you for all that you did. Others, you may never know the impact that you had. I know in my heart. I had a strong impact on my students. I’m a passionate teacher and passionate about education. I’m passionate about kids’ feelings that self-worth within themselves. That stems from my whole experience. Frankly, sometimes, when I didn’t feel that and knowing that is part of it.

You know, they can talk about standardize testing and all those scores, but you can test people to death, until they own their learning and feel good about themselves and have an expectation for themselves to achieve any goals they’re setting. You can test them till doomsday and it’s not going to impact anything. Testing, I’m not saying there isn’t a place for it. But, that’s not going to show if you have tenacity. It’s not going to show if you have passion and drive. It’s not going to show that you’re willing to work out a problem till you just get to the end of it, no matter how long it takes. It’s not going to show any of that. It’s not going to show your artistic skills, you’re creativity, and you’re, you know, pretty much everything that I do here isn’t on a standardized test, you know. But, yes literacy is on a test and I use lots of literacy in my job, writing grants, writing curriculum, and writing essays, and speaking things about indigenous culture, the exhibits, and so forth. I’m not saying it’s not in there, but those things don’t show up in that. So, I think the real threat through my education, was my mother’s push and my mother’s making sure that even though I was being educated in a modern world way that I was very connected to who I was as an indigenous person and very connected to my native community.

Um, that made me who I am now, because if you had asked me when I was eighteen, would I be running this museum. I would of told you, ”No.” If you had asked me at twenty-on, I would of told you, ”No.” If you had asked me at twenty-five, I would of told you, ”No.” If you had asked
me in 2000, was that the right year? Yeah, I’d have said, “No.”. But, somewhere between 2000 and 2002, my world changed and that was because I had three children. My oldest was going through public school and I was seeing him go through some of the same things that I went through, some of the same things that I went through, you know. When, you know, I wasn’t a boy. So, I think he even had it worse than I did. He kept being called a girl because he had long hair. It is traditional for our men to have long hair. You know, you would like to think, it’s just stupidity on the person’s part. But, when it’s the same person day after day after day, when the child’s been in school for three years, at some time they should know, where there is a handful of native kids, which we’re all cousins, handful of native kids in the elementary school and all the native boys pretty much have long hair. I think you shouldn’t be calling him a girl. I mean, it just happened like two weeks ago to my nephew. He went to the nurse’s office and the nurse kept calling him a girl and she gets on the phone with his mother, who has only sons and kept saying, “your daughter.” My sister kept saying, “I don’t have a daughter. I have a son.” She’s like, “She’s right her.” “No, he’s right there.” The woman couldn’t get it through her head. Now, when it constantly and you constantly have that negativity coming your way about who you are. That’s a negative impact on your self-esteem. In 2012, we would like to think we’re not still dealing with it. But unfortunately our children are.

Again, a lot of comes from being in rural areas, which is part of our homeland. Our reservation is in this rural area. There’s not a lot of diversity and that’s a negative impact. I felt that growing up, that negative impact of not a lot of diversity and not a lot of people that were like you.

Frankly, even when my kids were in school, I remember my son went to second grade. He had a cousin that was in the same grade. God forbid, they couldn’t put them in the same class. “Oh, but they’re related. So, we’ll put one here and one here.” Besides, it gives them a number, one minority kid in this class, one minority kid in this class. I went down and I complained. They didn’t do anything about it. But, I at least made them think. So, you know. “Why is it that, the majority kids can have role models and mentors and people that are like them in their class. If you are of this minority group, in this case, indigenous Native American Narragansett kids, you can never be in a class with someone that’s like you.” They know you are related because you have the same last name, whatever. You got to put one here and one here, never get to have someone that you can connect with. That understands you and your perspective and where you’re coming from and your ideology, which are completely different from the mainstream.

So, you know, I think that all my life experiences culminate in who I am, everything with my experiences with camp, going to that Tribes Institute that I mentioned in Colorado. That was a great experience that my mother facilitated. It stood for Technology, Resources, Business, Engineering, and Sciences. But, the whole program was native kids. In the periphery of the
school, we were intermingled with a whole bunch of diversity because it was a diverse school and there lots of kids from a lot of ethnicities that were there during the summer.

So, we had this huge contingency of native kids. But then, we also had this huge multicultural group we were with. That’s a great impact. I think, you know, when I founded the Nuweetooun School, people said to me, “Well, why do you want to segregate?” I said, “Well, I don’t think about it as segregating, even though these native kids were coming to this native school because we’re attached to a native museum. We have lots of intermingling of other kids that were coming to the museum that were also intermingling with our kids and getting a different perspective. We had kids from Ireland that came and gave a cross-cultural exchange between our kids. We had kids that came from Bermuda that gave a cross-cultural with our kids and we went to Bermuda. I didn’t think about it as isolating. I felt it as empowering.

Our kids live in a diverse world all the time. They’re always with the majority culture on their day by day. This was an experience to feel empowered about their native culture, speak their own language. Think about issues that are going on from a native perspective, which is never done. When the Smoke Shop Raid happened on the tribal reservation. My mother worked at the local public school and when she walked in the teacher’s room, they all shut up, you know, and (laugh) go silent. She knew they were talking about it, but because they all come from this one perspective and she was this lone person from this other perspective, even as an adult she was isolated. The kids feel that; when the majority teachers would bring up those kinds of current events in classrooms that were talking about native culture, say like the high school. They’re only giving that one perspective because they don’t have anyone there to give the other perspective. That’s hard and when you’re the only kid in the classroom, then you have to speak as a youth, have to speak on behalf of some big issue and be the only one from that perspective.

Traditions, but then, they have to balance living in this modern world, as we all do. I have a niece who went to a brand new school. It’s a Charter School. I won’t name it per say. She was new there this year and they decided they were doing some stuff about native culture and they were doing this talk and so forth. They proceeded to say that indigenous people had no spirituality before colonization (laugh). She’s like, “What?” You know, it’s totally a false statement. But, this is what they believe and so that’s what they were presenting to the students. While, she believed, because she went to Nuweetooun School, has a strong native family, is very connected to the community, as a freshman in high school, she felt empowered enough to speak against that and she came home and said she did that. They didn’t respond to it. She was just empowered enough to do that and you know, that’s what we want our kids to feel. We want them to be part of the greater American society, if you want to call it that. This is where we live. This is our homeland that’s now United States of America. We’re a part of that, but we also have a sense of identity as indigenous nations. We’re part of the Narragansett Indian Nation and these
are communities that are nation to nation with the United States deal on a federal to federal level, with that, we want our kids to feel that empowerment. We want them to feel good about being indigenous and understanding who they are, what they’re about, their culture and traditions. But, then they have to balance living in this modern world, as we all do. So, we want them to be able to do that. We also, want them to do what she did to be able to stand up for what is right and voice.

I wasn’t that empowered then. I think. I had had a lot more negativity. A lot more name-calling and things that made me feel a little more out of place. My tactic was just sort of try to blend, not that that works well. But, you know, just be the friend, so to speak. Not that these kids don’t want to be the friend and they do have lots of friends and lots of diverse people and so forth. But, I think, they are more empowered and things like the Nuweetouun School helped empower some of these kids. I also think, things that happened in the media, helped empower some of the native youth. You know, sort of, “The Dances with Wolves”, the “Pocahontas” cartoon. Now grant it, how false that information all is. This was a wave of empowerment on the wings of those kinds of movies that came pervasive and even though they’re kind of vague in their actual identity of Indianness. It was more that happened about Indian culture with those things, you know.

There was that American Indian Movement we just had and Russell Means, who passed away. But, that movement was important to indigenous communities. If you think about it, when that movement was going on. I was young. But, the next generation, they’re felling that strength from that movement that made their lives a little easier and a lot less tumultuous on being who they are as indigenous peoples.

I love my job because I’m connected to the native community and native issues all the time, through the art, through the humanities, through what you do in a museum, educate cultural educators. I’m always able to work on projects, even if you’re writing a grant. It’s still about a project that is related to the native community.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided insight into the experiences of three indigenous adults as they told their stories of their journeys as students traveling through their educational experiences in non-indigenous schools. Each of these stories is unique, but certain patterns and themes begin to emerge as the stories unfold. These themes may provide a more in depth look at these experiences and how they affected the perceptions of the individuals involved resulting in the
people they have become today. The following chapter will describe the themes that were common to all as each of the participants told her of his story.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

Findings in the Stories

It is only through the decolonization of our minds, if not our hearts, that we can begin to develop the necessary political clarity to reject the enslavement of a colonial discourse that creates a false dichotomy between Western and indigenous knowledge. It is only through the decolonization of our hearts that we can begin to humanize the meaning and usefulness of indigeneity. (Semali, 1999, p. 10).

Chapter 4 provided the individual voices of the participants. Chapter 5 will describe the common properties that identify relationships among the crucial elements within each story. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the data findings and the connections of not only the teaching of indigenous students, but also, students from different cultures. Analysis will be attributed to patterns of themes that were found within the stories of three indigenous adults who attended non-indigenous schools as students. The themes emerged from the initial coding resulting in the breaking down of the codes into themes. Verbatim quotes will be used to describe the participants’ experiences along with my interpretations and descriptions of these experiences.

Semali & Kincheloe (1999) and others have noted worldview expressed through indigenous knowledge as knowledge that is holistic in nature, where ideas and practices are treated as one. This is not to assume that each indigenous culture is the same but that each culture is different in its own right. Semali & Kincheloe (1999) also state that indigenous knowledge is passed down to each generation orally and it is through this passage that the culture
is transmitted holistically, providing the nurturing and sharing of human relationships with
themselves and with nature.

This study’s findings are not comprehensive and it is not the intent of the research to
generalize across indigenous cultures. Generalization is not the purpose of narrative research.
The researchers hopes that the findings from this study will help to enhance the research not only
in indigenous learning, but in learning across all cultures and take into consideration local
knowledges and teaching approaches.

Mitchell (2007) & MacIvor (1995) suggest basic teaching approaches that include
“experiential learning, sharing circles, storytelling, drawing, painting, singing, drumming,
making models, elder guidance, observation, apprenticeship, ritual and ceremony, dreaming and
imagination, supervised and unsupervised participation, and intergenerational teaching (p. 137).

**Theme: Acceptance**

The indigenous participants expressed difficulty in gaining acceptance or “fitting in”
within groups in their elementary, junior high, high school, and in some instances college years
while they traveled through their educational journeys. Although, they had amity towards many
different individuals or groups, they had no real connections. LM expresses this many times
during his story as he tries to find his place. “You would always be the outsider looking in these
different cultures.” He never feels apart or connected to any of these friends and groups as he
travels back and forth between different cultures during his school years. He is constantly
reminded that he is different, left out, and an outsider within the group.

“What’s going on here?” I’m one of you guys. I’m part of this, you know, I’m hanging
out. I’m friends, where like brothers here. Why can’t I say it?” Again, I’m reminded, you
know. These are the things that really stood out to me as a kid. But, um, it seemed that
the friends, whether they were white or black or whatever they were, people kind of stood
out within their community as want to reach out and be different, you know. I was always reminded that I was not really one of them.

AW tells his journey as an indigenous student in a non-indigenous school as one that is filled with personal challenges that he had to endure. He believes these challenges were mostly due to his physical appearance, which affects his acceptance by other students.

School for me growing up was something you try to forget because it was so hard, because of the long hair. I kept it in braids. My mom always put it in two pigtails. She still won’t let me cut it as you can see. It was long, if not longer. I had the girlish features. This was before Fabio. So, boys weren’t supposed to have long hair. I went through a lot of abuse, when I was in elementary school (AW).

Though AW is not accepted by other students he still enjoys being with other kids and playing with them when they are not picking on him. While he describes these first educational experiences, he notes that he is still able to develop some bonds and friendships but, he is not able to have friends like others. He notes that other students are distracting each other with notes, he states, “I don’t have those friends.” AW mentions that where he grew up there are very few Caucasian kids that he could relate to and understand him and not want to pick on him because he was different.

LS tells her story of attending school while integration is going on within the district. She describes not fitting in any of the groups.

I went to Agassiz School and literally had pretty much no friends at that school because everybody was segregating themselves because it was being forced integration. So there were the kids that were African American black as we were calling them in those days. Then or the other side there was the Caucasian American or white. Then, I was an odd ball. I didn’t fit either group. They knew I didn’t fit. Whether I knew it or not, I didn’t fit in any of the groups.

Resolution. LM found resolution of acceptance by not trying to “fit in” with various groups but by returning to his traditional culture that he grew up in.
I guess eventually it just got to the point, “You’re right, I’m not and it’s time for me to find where I belong,” so to speak. I found my way home. Thank god! Many native people don’t. I started turning my life around, you know at the age of 22. But for me it’s my traditional culture that I now embrace fully. Something just clicked with me, a gift from the creator (LM).

AW found acceptance by returning to his traditional ways by remembering cultural stories that were told to him in his childhood. He mentions his mother’s story explaining the braiding of his hair as a “life-changing experience.” He references this story many times in his story as one that he often returns to and reflects upon.

Your hair is an extension of who you are. That’s why you grow it. As you see I’m braiding it to keep it neat and tidy. When you look at this braid. There are three parts that go into that braid, that’s your body, your mind, and your spirit. That brings unity in yourself. When we put all those things together, we extend all those things. It’s a good thing. I didn’t necessarily fully grasp it at that time. It was enough to help me through. As time has gone on, I can revisit that moment, over, and over, and over again every time I am challenged. I mean, I’ve come to just appreciate, I can’t imagine without my hair now (AW).

LS finds acceptance through her family, especially her mother, and her connections within her cultural community and traditions.

But, probably my truest closest people are my family. So, I think the real threat through my education, was my mother’s push and my mother’s making sure that even though I was being educated in a modern world way that I was very connected to who I was as an indigenous person and very connected to my native community (LW).

**Summary**

The indigenous individuals constantly struggle to find acceptance throughout their journeys in non-indigenous educational environments. They use different tactics to cope with their situations, such as “to blend” to try to fit in or resort to difficult behavior for attention. They reflect upon childhood stories, observe relatives deconstructing, and use their experiences within
their culture to resolve the issue of acceptance. Through these reference points in their lives, they are able to find acceptance within their family and cultural groups.

**Theme: Marginality**

Feelings of marginality can come from perceptions of self or how others perceive the individual. The indigenous individual has feelings of being different, which brings about confusion in self-image and personal identity as opposed to acceptance that occurs within the social group. “So early on we just felt different all the time and I don’t think anybody around me, my mom or especially my brothers, were not prepared to cope with surroundings. It was really a horrible feeling, you know, trying to find your place” (LM). “But, it’s like, um, you’re always different, you always don’t fit. You’re always trying to blend. So, you spend a lot of you’re time trying to smooth it out, just so that you can survive” (LS).

**First Awareness of Marginality.** The indigenous individuals feel marginality at a young age and these are demonstrated through early interactions with others.

So the first memories I had when growing up, we just didn’t know where we fit in. I laugh about this now. The white kids didn’t like us because we were too dark. The black kids didn’t like us because we were too light. It was a peculiar phenomenon we had to go through. So people said, well what are you? Well we are native. So, what does that mean? (LM)

“When I was young, you know, it was obvious we were different. We had different things” (AW).

Marginality is felt according to different factors for the indigenous individual. These include physical appearance, religion and cultural beliefs. “I know it wasn’t the way I acted. I’m pretty sure it was the way I looked. Like I said, the hair caused a lot of problems. A lot of challenges, personal challenges that I already pointed out. The physical appearance, I was a scrawny kid too. It probably made it easy for them to pick on me” (AW).
LS feels a negative impact on her self-worth by not fitting into what is considered the norm for physical appearance.

Um, I’ll give you an example of that, myself and a non-minority girlfriend, who was not that stereotype, very blonde, blue-eyed. I’m not making fun of people who are blonde and blue-eyed. It was just what he was attracted to. So, if you were the cheerleader, blonde, blue-eyed, he’d toss nerf balls to you when you leaned a four armed pass to play volleyball, If you were not that, he stuck you in a corner and drilled them at you with the regular volleyball as hard as he could and then yelled at you when you couldn’t receive serve. That’s a negative, which kind of re-enforces the negative for someone like myself who doesn’t fit the media norm of what’s beautiful or the media norm of what’s acceptable or what people want to look like, you know. Um, we all wanted our hairdo the Farrah Faucett thing, not happening (laughter), you know. That’s what I’m saying, you know, you don’t always fit the norm and that’s an impact negatively on yourself-concept (LS).

LS tells the story of her niece, who is older in high school and stands up and defends her native spirituality. But, she expresses concerns for the self-esteem of younger students who are not able to do this.

Traditions, but then, they have to balance living in this modern world, as we all do. I have a niece who went to a brand new school. It’s a Charter School. I won’t name it per say. She was new there this year and they decided they were doing some stuff about native culture and they were doing this talk and so forth. They proceeded to say that indigenous people had no spirituality before colonization (laugh). She’s like, “What?” You know, it’s totally a false statement. But, this is what they believe and so that’s what they were presenting to the students. While, she believed, because she went to Nuweetooun School, has a strong native family, is very connected to the community. She was just empowered enough to do that and you know, that’s what we want our kids to feel (LS).

**Marginality and Stereotypes.** One example of marginality is the stereotyping of Indians, which dictates how the individual is supposed to act leading to confusion in self-image and personal identity.

I didn’t know all the things I needed to know about my identity. I wasn’t comfortable enough with my identity to care about it. So, what I knew mostly about Indians was what I saw on TV or that I am supposed to do certain things. So, it was really a lot of confusion about what I am, who I am and where I fit in. Then you see in all the crazy movies that
came out, you know the old Hollywood movies. So to really, a mess you become, you
know, to understand these things (LM).

Though LS expresses she had a lot of friends, it didn’t take much to set someone off
resulting in stereotyping and name-calling.

Um, through that experience from 5th to 8th grade, despite the fact I had lots of friends and
I had a core group of girlfriends. Um, I was called every name in the book, um,
everything from the ‘n’ word, which is infamous for anybody of color. Um, to redskin, to
red stick, black stick, um, like, I said the ‘n’ any kind of derogatory racial word they
could come up with. Negative hoots and you know, hollers, that people do that represents
“Indianness”, a, in a negative way (LS).

**Marginality and the Educational Journey.** Feelings of marginality for the indigenous
individual continue throughout the educational journey within the non-indigenous school
environment. AW believes his teachers never understood him and they didn’t care enough to
even try.

I didn’t think I would be in a school again or have any interest. I mean, he told me
himself, the principal when I was in the back of the cruiser, you know. “You’re a failure,
you’re not going anywhere, you’re not tryin’, you’re not applyin’ yourself. You’re a
loser. You’ll always be a loser. The next time I see you, it’s gonna be in the court report
or the obituary. Been meaning to catch up with him and show him I disproved his theory.
But, I’m pretty sure I can see why he said it too. He was trying to motivate me to prove
him wrong. But, deep down in side, I think honestly, there was a piece of him that
honestly believed all the nonsense he spit at me that day. It wasn’t like I set out to
disprove him. It’s just; I’m living my life, bro. That’s something you and every other
teacher never understood. You can try to mold me into what you think an average
American kid should be, but I’m not that average American kid, as you should of already
realized, you know. I’m not bothering’ people.

LM believes that racism is the key factor in his educational journey. It was okay to be
racist towards the Indian.

Then, I had these racist teachers that I was dealing with, saying negative things.
That was something that everyone agreed on in the school. Indians were kind of to be ridiculed. Hey, there’s a savage and they would do the stupid war hoop. It was pretty dismal. It was just so uncomfortable. So, I would act out. That was when I started drinking and drinking heavy, doing stupid things to stand out, getting in trouble, getting suspended, getting into fights (LM).

**The Ambit of Marginality.** The indigenous individuals were able to take their experiences full circle and turn them into positive experiences to benefit others and their culture.

I really think I have not only have an unique perspective of people, but a really inside look, because I have shared with all the other cultures. But even to this day it is part of the reason that I write. Very few people understand the first people of this land. I think all this trauma that was outside me. It forces to go in, escape and I think my way of escaping was my imagination and my ability to get out of this body because of all this pain it was in and to start seeing the universe and start thinking outside of it. That was the gift that I was giving and take that and transform it into something positive through the music, through the writing, to actually make some use out of it (LM).

AW is able to reflect back upon his experiences in non-indigenous schools and use these experiences as a way to help students within their educational environments.

They told me stories. I use the stories that I always tell these children when I’m in these schools. Like I said trying to pull out awareness, like I was a kid. I went to a public school like this. It was very awkward for many reasons. But mainly, just that abuse really stands out and I don’t want to see it repeated. “I’m really thankful your teachers have invited me here. I could of used something like this. I hope it’ll instill pride in all of you for all of our cultures.” (AW)

LS believes that her experience has inspired her be a passionate teacher who cares about her students and their self-worth.

Some people always said to me, “You drive all the way to Newport?” I loved that because I worked with native kids, Hispanic kids, Asian kids from all different walks of life. That was empowering as an educator to know that I impacted their lives in some way. Some, you know that overly impacted because you meet up with them as adults and they come up to you as adults and hug you and thank you for all that you did. Others, you may never know the impact that you had. I know in my heart. I had a strong impact on my students. I’m a passionate teacher and passionate about education. I’m passionate about kids’ feelings that self-worth within themselves. That stems from my whole experience.
Resolution. Resolution for the indigenous individual comes through their religion and cultural communities. LM believes that through his spiritual and cultural connections, he was able to turn his life around.

I’m not a fan of religion but I do believe in the power of ceremony. As I said I’m not sure how to explain what god is or is not. Our Elders call that force the Great Mystery. I guess that’s the best way to describe it for me. But the power of our ceremonies … the Circle and the fire is that connection to all that is within the universe. As I shared with you, my childhood was not happy. But through the connection of my culture and ceremony- that has saved my life (LM).

AW believes he has no malice towards the individuals that picked on him while he was in school and has found comfort within his cultural community.

A couple of the kids we hung out with were white and some of them looked me up on face book. “Yeah, I always think about you.” In the back of my mind, I thought you hated me. Like, you made me feel that way. Sometimes, I’ll tell them too. I really didn’t have many friends there. “Sorry, I haven’t been in touch, but. I’m kind of trying to forget about what happened at Charlestown Elementary. Hopefully, I’m not doing it to be malicious. I’m not doing it to make them feel bad. But, they do need to reflect on how you treat people with your life, everyone does. But, my friends now a days are people who are drumming, are attending ceremony. I need any opportunity to dance in a pow wow, circle, with my regalia all over it, you know, love it, love it (AW).

LS is able to reflect upon her educational journey and finds resolution through her family and cultural community, which empowered her as an indigenous person and not the non-indigenous schools that she attended.

Um, but as an adult, when I look back, I always say to myself, it wasn’t an empowering circumstance. There was nothing there that let me be proud of myself as an indigenous person. Um, really never anything in my educational experience was there anything empowering about who I was as an indigenous person. That I got from all my family, you know, my community experiences (LS).
Summary

The indigenous individuals express many times feelings of being different and they give numerous examples of marginality throughout their educational journeys. Though, they express negative situations, they are able to see that these experiences are apart of who they are. They are able to find resolution and take these experiences and turn them into positive experiences to benefit the communities within their culture and beyond. The individuals are able to embrace their spirituality and traditional ways as the bases to enhance their self-image and personal identity.

Theme: Traditional Ways

Feelings of Empowerment. LS describes her positive feelings of empowerment that make her feel special, which come from her culture’s traditional ways. First, she describes these as a young girl in her grandparents’ restaurant.

So, I had all those experiences. Again, positive and empowering and native, you know. We were serving native food, johnnycakes, and succotash, and of course, all the seafood and venison, elk, and moose and bear, you know. All these unique things that make us special, make the restaurant and so forth. Those things were all empowering.

She later describes her feelings of empowerment of participating in her traditional customs during her college years at Simmons College.

I remembered being there, so, I was what empowered. I remember I had my regalia, which is my traditional clothes there and I was beading it in my dorm room. I also remember being in my dorm room and putting on like, pow wow tapes and dancing and things like that.

Explanations. LM believes that traditional ways and culture have helped him turn his life around and provided him with comfort and explanations. “As I shared with you, my childhood
was not happy. But through the connection of my culture and ceremony- that has saved my life.”

(LM)

LM is trying to make sense of the world he is living in and looks to his traditional ways to give him the answers. He explains that traditional ways have many lessons to teach us.

Our traditional stories teach us that the animals talk to us long ago. They were our teachers, the wolf, the bear because the crow, which is my spirit animal. I tell people this today. You look at a crow or a bear, they could live out in a storm, could you? They can survive outside. They can do many different things we can’t do. So obviously, we are going to learn how to survive from these many elements of nature. We say we are talking to them. We are talking to them in our spirit because they’ve been here millions of years longer than we have or thousands of years. So obviously, they have a better understanding of this world we live in. So, we are not above something that’s been here a lot longer. So, we are to live in harmony and quality with these things. (LM)

Identity. LS believes that her native culture and traditions are important because they represent who they are as people. In order for the culture to be preserved, it is necessary to marry within the native culture because it will be difficult to maintain traditions otherwise.

However, it is difficult not impossible, but difficult sometimes when there’s diversity to keep the native culture going and that is an important part of who we are. So, you know, if one generation marries out and then other generation of that family marries out, before you know it you’re totally disconnected to their indigenous culture and tradition. That’s an important part for me. So, I certainly encourage my children when they are of marrying age, knock on wood, my son’s only eighteen. I’m not ready for him to be married but in the future to have that indigenous connection. (LS)

AW notes that he is the person he is due to learning about life as his native traditions have always taught their children within their culture.

But, honestly most of where I’ve been, gone or headed has been from me learning from life experiences, which is in many ways how our culture was always taught, you know. Lead by example in the community, observe as a child, encouraged to do things, experiment as a child.
LM expresses that he is comfortable and identifies spending time with his grandparents while practicing their cultural traditions.

We would pick berries and try to avoid stepping in the cow pies. We would bring them back and he would make his bannock bread, like or call it dough dads or fried bread, some people call it. There are different names for it. It was such happy times. (LM)

LM believes that there is little or no historical knowledge concerning native culture and traditional ways. He believes that the inaccuracies in history have affected his people in the knowledge of who they are and how others view them.

Education, knowledge is very important. Learning about whom and what we are brings a new purpose to one’s life. Learning true history can transform the stigmas and lies that some of us were taught to believe for so long. Knowledge is emotional and “spiritual” freedom. Not just for native people but for all so that we can all interact with the same knowledge or at least mutual understanding. (LM)

**Loss of Traditional Ways.** AW is angry concerning the continual loss of traditional ways. “This casino is scarin’ the shit out of me, driving us away. Like I said, we have enough things drivin’ us away. Like I said, we have enough things drivin’ our kids and our people away from our culture and our belief.” (AW) He expresses, at one time the whole nation felt as he did with the love of their existence in traditional ways. He feels he is in the minority now and needs help in establishing the old love of traditional ways. He sees some of his people only caring about casinos and the benefits they can receive for being native.

They don’t want to do the ceremony. They don’t want to sit out in the woods for days, just givin’ back to the land for all that it gives us, you know. They don’t want to take off work early just to go to a ceremony or attend a funeral. They don’t want to learn how to drum. They don’t want to sit there every week, commit that time every week. They’ll take their kid to practice every day and be a baseball star and teach him to be a basketball star, but, you’re not teachin’ that kid how to drum. You’re not teachin’ him how to dance. You don’t even know yourself. We’re losing more and more every generation. (AW)
AW believes that his people have strayed far away from traditional values such as “worshiping the land”. He expresses how important the land and his upbringing is to him and he revisits his childhood.

That’s the stuff that was always important to me. Where I grew up it was country, playing in the woods, climbin’ trees, jumping out of one tree and jumpin’ into another tree like some dam flyin’ squirrel. That was the kind of upbringing I had and I wouldn’t change it for anything. I definitely wouldn’t trade it in for no video game or nothin’ or Internet. (AW)

He believes he is in the minority now and he is alone with these thoughts. This has truly saddened him.

Right now, I’m in a very difficult time without realizing it, like I said, I’m try to reach out to people. You can be the change you want to be in the world, but you could very well be that only person in the world who believes that. (AW)

Summary

The love of the indigenous individuals for their traditional ways is very evident as they tell their stories. They give numerous examples during their everyday encounters within mainstream culture and educational journeys of how traditional ways give them comfort and solace. The individuals describe their love of their traditional culture as a journey that they go through with varying degrees of realization in the value of traditional ways within their lives. The importance of cultural traditions is different for each individual and they all embrace their traditional ways during different stages of their journeys.

Theme: Colonization

The indigenous participants believe that everything in the universe is connected and one should nourish and help develop the world in which the individual is a part of. The Eurocentric
worldview is one of dominating the world, which can be frightening to indigenous thought in the sense of unbalancing humans with nature.

**Historical Trauma.** The indigenous individuals tell their stories of how different perspectives of history are given pertaining to the natives and early European settlers. These stories are told with varying degrees of emotion concerning the effects of colonization upon their native communities. LM describes what he has learned from his grandfather, the elders, and the archives of his native history and how he believes that people need to know the missing pieces of history.

I remember watching a show on PBS just at the time I was coming into sobriety. There was this show about Christopher Columbus and the discovery. I was just getting some enlightenment into my heritage. It was talking about the Indians were not mentioned in the Bible, a group of people that God never mentions and how alcohol was brought to indigenous people. This anger came over me, “What the blank are we doing?” This is there stuff, no wonder it’s having such a dilatory effect on us. This wasn’t meant for us. Christianity was used to enslave our ancestors and we’re not mentioned in their Bible. We’ve been duped for so long. (LM)

AW describes his feelings of hopelessness as he looks around him and sees only colonization and no history of his people’s existence.

I can’t even tell you. This is a hopeless feeling. I should be able to look out this window and see some sign of my people, my existence our culture. A lot of these plants are European invasive species. When you’re in a cattail marsh and you see phragmite comin’ on one end, phragmite is an European invasive breed that chokes out the area, dominates the area, it chokes out, the birds can’t get through it. It gets so thick; birds can’t get through it, rabbits. Whole environment will be destroyed, just because that’s comin’ in. It’s a European invasive breed. It reminds me of colonization. On the other side, of the marsh, purple loosestrife, purple loosestrife climbin’ up the cattail, chokin’ it and smotherin’ it and pushing it down. You look at it and see it everywhere and wow, so oppressive. Colonization, you know, that’s what I see, when I look out this window, you know. Like it’s everyday. (AW)
LS describes the one majority perspective that is given in schools because of colonization and its effect upon the indigenous students.

The kids feel that; when the majority teachers would bring up those kinds of current events in classrooms that were talking about native culture, say like the high school. They’re only giving that one perspective because they don’t have anyone there to give the other perspective. That’s hard and when you’re the only kid in the classroom, then you have to speak as a youth, have to speak on behalf of some big issue and be the only one from that perspective. (LS)

Identity Conflict. Conflict may result concerning one’s personal identity within the Eurocentric mainstream culture. How mainstream culture views the indigenous individual may lead to confusion in social and personal identity.

What am I going to melt into that is going to make me feel 100% human being, whole. You know, the idea is to get whole, if everything is Eurocentric. In a way it’s identifying one group and I’m supposed to fit into that, but what happens to me when I show up with my brown skin and different beliefs, cultural understandings. They don’t fit in with what’s being displayed in society. So then, that’s when conflict comes in. You know, my way is better that your way and so forth. (LM)

LM believes there are missing pieces in American history that need to be explored relating to his native culture. These missing pieces may shed light on the cultural identity of the indigenous people.

So a lot of things that we see we hear about Indians during the pilgrims. Then we won’t show up again until Geronimo sometimes. There are a whole lot of things that happened to us that get us where we are today. (LM)

AW describes what it was like to be told he didn’t exist as portrayed from the Eurocentric view in his social studies class. He remembers raising his hand and correcting his teacher that he has an identity and his tribe does exist and the consequences that follow his action.

I was told I didn’t exist in social studies. When the topic came up. It was like…and they have an identity and it’s Wampanoag. These things were not bein’ taught. I remember
raisin’ my hand and tellin’ my teacher, no there’s Wampanoags. I remember, he literally, he felt challenged, I’m sure as a teacher. I don’t think any teacher wants to be corrected in front of their class. There may be some training, “Under no circumstances can you be corrected in your own classroom by a student,” you know. He was pretty adamant about, “No you’re not right.” I think, I got detention or something for tellin’ him, “I’m a Wampanoag,” and standing by my word. “You’re a trouble maker, get out of here, go to the office.” I remember that. (AW)

As I get older it is more obvious, wow, these people are just rude. It wasn’t until I became an adult, the language, the clothing; all of it is totally European. It’s becoming more bothersome as I get older. (AW)

**Education in Conflict.** As the participants’ reflect upon their educational journeys, they discuss the challenges of learning in non-indigenous schools. “I think that all the years growing up, you know, the grades kindergarten through I guess all of high school, really had a negative impact on me” (LM).

So, yeah, history and social studies, nope, I don’t think I learned anything from all those teachers throughout all those years. Again, social studies and history kind of only told from an Anglo perspective. So, kind of hard to describe, it was very boring, you know. Like, pretty much every history teacher I ever had, as you can see, I love history. I kind of live it, you know. It’s kind of whom I am, very intriguing. (AW)

So, yeah, those things were rough, but as for the academic stuff you know, it was challenging too. You know, pledge of allegiance, I learned at a pretty young age, this is not right, you know. This is like Arian nation, Adolph Hitler type shit. I have to stand a certain. I don’t have a choice in this matter. Yeah, I was born here, but this isn’t even your country. You know what I mean? (AW)

AW describes learning the Eurocentric history teachings and the conflicts that arise when the teachings clash with the indigenous history he is learning at home.

At the same rate, when you get sent home with a homework assignment about Christopher Columbus and the teacher told you what you were supposed to know about Christopher Columbus and your dad tells you what really need to know about Christopher Columbus you come back in with this homework assignment that does not reflect anything the teacher shared with you and you get graded with a “F” or thrown out of school. You get disciplined. You got chastised in the classroom in front of your peers
probably. Luckily, your dad comes in and he does his best to address the situation. He has a little one on one with the teacher after school, whatever, or a phone call, you know. You guys can try and teach my son, whatever, but we’re natives and I have every right to teach my son what I know what is accurate history. Those things presented themselves a lot more so, probably most kids. I’m sure my brothers went through it because they were being raised in the same house. (AW)

“This is the truth. This is what you are going to go back and tell them. Whether they grade you favorably or not. You are going to do this report like this.” I really appreciate my dad doing that. I really do. I had to it for my kids at certain times. (AW)

LS reflects back on her educational journey and notes there is nothing there that makes her proud to be an indigenous person. She attributes the strong bonds she has with her family and cultural community as providing her with this empowerment.

Um, but as an adult, when I look back, I always say to myself, it wasn’t an empowering circumstance. There was nothing there that let me be proud of myself as an indigenous person. Um, really never anything in my educational experience was there anything empowering about who I was as an indigenous person. That I got from all my family, you know, my community experiences. (LS)

Resolution. LM finds resolution by being the tribal historian for the Nipmuc tribe. He believes there is not a lot of information concerning his people and he tries to educate others about the Nipmuc woodland tribe. “I try to bring forth the stories of tribal people that can benefit all native people and not just native people but benefit the world. Teaching about American history that is really not spoken about enough I think” (LM).

I’m also the tribal historian too, so I’ve been studying my tribe’s land transactions, the history such as the Kings Philip’s War of 1675, which really changed things for us dramatically. That was a really big moment epic in time for our tribe. They are very chronological events without really giving life to these people. That is what I want to do such as these stories, such as the stories of Monowat. I give you more of a background, they had a life, they laughed, they cried, they had aspirations. Their life didn’t begin
when the pilgrims landed. Their life didn’t begin with the beginning of the war and end there. (LM)

He explains in order for his people to resolve and survive colonization, they will need to embrace their native culture.

There has been such a revival in our culture, in our tradition, not only people like my self, but many of the leaders of our tribe that have shaken off the yokes of colonialism and really got in touch with their culture, their roots, my mother, she’s one of the elders now. So it was a combination of things that caused us to survive. So this way of life is important to native people. They need it. (LM)

He finds solace in reading a lot of American history and writing a column. Through these, he is able to put together some of the missing pieces of American and native history.

That people are not thinking about to really learn the history of America. I read different perspectives... I read tons of history, you know. I love to learn about history, but also native history, where just read like a lot about what the first settlers said and different things. Then you start piecing together the truth because they’re obviously slanted in what they are saying. The savages are frolicking about in the woods. You’re hearing things like that. You take what they say and you look at historical facts, you begin putting these things together. You come out with an accurate picture of history. (LM)

AW finds solace in observing the environments that his ancestors were in and to see what they saw through their eyes.

So, when I go someplace, when I can be around woods, a good amount of it. That gives me hope there’s still places like that in the world, you know. Like, yeah, those are the places I feel comfortable. I’m really glad we have a swamp, you know. That’s where our people went when we hid from the English, when they were tryin’ to kill us, you know. Build a village in the swamp pretty much guarantee they’re not goin’ to find you there. There’s a lot of times I feel at home in the swamp. (AW)

AW finds resolution in observing and describing successful cultural educational curriculums in other cultures. “That promoted pride in your heritage. Still taught you, I guess academics. But throughout you’re being taught your culture. The culture is embedded in your
everyday schooling in various forms” (AW). He relates the effects of witnessing this upon him and the children.

You go through the library and you look, and not only did they have books, of course, but they had gourds. The gourds went tap, tap...clap, thump, make their music from, you know, that gourd was right there with the library, library book. That was a powerful symbol to me. Wow, if I could of saw my drums, when they were ramming this European shit down my throat. I would of at least said, you’re open to my way of life, you’re just not trying to totally eradicate it, you know. I would of felt that as a kid even. These kids are seeing that everyday. They’re seeing Hawaiians that look like them, teaching them, caring about them, things that they genuinely care about with those children. Things that are important to their culture, to their existence. (AW)

LS finds resolution in the fact that she started the Nuweetououn School. She believes that through this native school, students are empowered in finding their historical connections within a mainstream culture.

We want them to be part of the greater American society, if you want to call it that. This is where we live. This is our homeland that’s now United States of America. We’re apart of that, but we also have a sense of identity as indigenous nations. We’re part of the Narragansett Indian Nation and these are communities that are nation to nation with the United States deal on a federal to federal level, with that, we want our kids to fee that empowerment. We want them to feel good about being indigenous and understanding who they are, what they’re about, their culture and traditions. But, then they have to balance living in this modern world, as we all do. So, we want them to be able to do that. We also, want them to do what she did to be able to stand up for what is right and voice. (LS)

**Summary**

The indigenous participants choose to deal with the effects of colonization in different ways. They find resolution by embracing their native traditions by teaching others about their culture. Through cultural identity, they teach their children how important it is to be proud of their customs and traditions. They find resolution in witnessing successful curriculums in other cultures. They find solace in today’s modern world through reflection and observing the land
through their ancestors’ eyes. The embracing of cultural traditions in family relationships often times leads to indigenous empowerment outside of conflicting educational experiences.

**Theme: Relationships**

**Friendship and Identity.** LM describes having several “good friends” who have similar interests to him but at the same time he is not able to identify with a larger group, as the other ethnic groups have been able to do and at the same time be apart of the town that they all live in.

I remember a friend ‘E’; he was a redheaded white kid. He was a good friend. We’d hang out for a while, S and C, two brothers, who were black. We had similar interests, smart kids. I think I was I was lucky to have them at the time because I really didn’t feel like I was having this intricate connection with large groups of friends where like I said you see the black kids, the white kids, the Irish kids having these large groups of social collectivism, where they are all doing things. Other than the pow wow, I just couldn’t be in my town and feel like apart of it or wherever we were. (LM)

I remember being with my friend ‘E’ and then there other kids around and they would do bonfires in the woods or whatever and he said you have to tell them you are Portuguese or you are Italian. Don’t tell them you are Indian. (LM)

AW is not able to identify with many Caucasian friends as he is growing up and he feels this is due to lack of understanding and the fact that he is different. He is able to relate to a Puerto Rican friend in grade school and refers to him as his “best friend” because he is unique and different.

Yeah, like friendships over my life have been people growing up, there were very few Caucasian kids, where I grew up in RI that I could relate to, that could understood me. That didn’t want to pick on me just because they appreciated this kid’s different, you know. I don’t know what ‘s not to appreciate. Who wants the same average friend that anyone could have. I mean, I don’t know, I like unique people. But, you know, Puerto Rican kid, I remember when he moved in, boy was I glad, wow we have another ethnicity. He’s not Indian, he’s not black, he’s Puerto Rican. That’s a distinct group of people. His parents were both Puerto Rican. The food they prepared, the things that they had were different and I gravitated towards that. He was my best friend in grade school.
LM is able to become close and identifies with a Laotian friend because they have similar physical features and have a lot in common.

There was another friend I had growing up with. We were very close. He was actually from Laos, a Laotian kid. We found that we had a lot in common. I remember his family was sponsored to come here and they grew up in the forest part of Springfield. I was really attracted to his family. He had one brother and seven sisters. It was kind of a wild house and them being Asiatic, we all seemed to fit in, you know, having similar features, but shorter, (ha, ha). So, he was another good friend. But, um, it seemed that the friends, whether they were white or black or whatever they were, people kind of stood out within their community as want to reach out and be different, you know. I was always reminded that I was not really one of them. (LM)

AW, as an adult, identifies with his native friends who uphold the traditional ways. “But, my friends now a days are people who are drumming, are attending ceremony. A lot of pow wow friends.”

LS reflects back to her childhood friends and even though there are very few native students for her to identify with she is still able to have many friends.

I had this one friend who was in Exeter, the whole time, her name is ‘S’. We were friends forever since kindergarten, all through that time on and off, when I was moving around. We always came back to being friends. From the 5th grade on we were the like the best of friends and frankly we still know each other and see each other regularly and are best of friends till this day. Um, in the 6th grade, it became a threesome; another girl named ‘P’ became part of our core network of friends. They were both non-native, like I said; I was one of the few kids of color, period, in the school.

LS is able to establish a close friendship in college and identifies with her friend because they are unique in their diversity. “One of my best friends to this day was my roommate from college. She was Greek American we had a diversity. We had a fit with each other cause we were unique in that” (LS).

**Superficial versus Deep Relationships.** LS describes herself as a friendly person who is able to find a “niche” wherever she goes. She reflects upon the superficial and deep relationships in her past.
But, if you notice, if I look back, each of those places, I ended up with sort of a best friend. I think an elder of mine always said, “You can have lots of friends, but you’re not going to have many best friends.” Those are those people that you truly have a deep relationship with. (LS)

LS continues to reflect upon her past friendships and realizes that she has had many diverse friendships. But, she also notes their limitations in understanding her native cultural identity and realizes that her family is the closest relationship that she has.

So, I think, I’m very friendly in general and know lots of people. But, it’s really those true best friends, no matter the ethnicity. I have best friends within the native community for sure. I have these non-standing non-native friends. Now, can they totally understand everything about my nativeness? No. As an adult, I see that and I don’t expect that. But, probably my truest closest people are my family. But, when I say family, that’s extended family. I mean, in the native community, we’re very close with our third cousins, you know, our third cousins are like first cousins to other folks. (LS)

AW notes that many friendships are superficial and do not last very long.

You don’t know. Sometimes, if they’re goin’ to this pow wow or that one, but if you get to a pow wow and you see them it’s good you’re friends. It’s pretty genuine, I guess. You grow up. You don’t see each other every day. You’re pretty close still. Those are friendships that come and go, kind of with the wind.

He relates how important trust is for a deeper relationship. “Friendships come and go, a lot of factors in that. The friendships I’ve had, it’s who I can trust, who’s demonstrated throughout my life or over a period of time. They’ll be honest with me, there’ll be trust” (AW).

AW describes the importance of his traditional culture in forming deeper relationships while helping his native friends.

He’s that kind of person and it’s happened not only with him, but a lot of the kid’s I’ve tried to help. They don’t see that obviously. Yeah, I try to help him, anyone that appeals to me and shows interest in the culture. (AW)

**Family Relationships.** LM discusses his relationships with his mother and father. “My mom, and of course the father wasn’t there, my father and all the while nobody really to reach
out to” (LM). He reflects upon the remarriage of his mother and its result, “She was dealing with her own stuff.” He describes his relationship with his stepfather as something he is not comfortable with. “She remarried and had a stepfather. I’m not comfortable with that term. He was you know, not a father at all to us. So being with my grandparents were the happiest time as a kid” (LM).

LM discusses his grandparents with tenderness and how comfortable he is with them. He expresses the impact of his grandma and grandpa upon him while they are doing native cultural activities together.

I remember him talking about how we see daisies as weeds and they’ll be used for several different poultices as intoxicants to clean and purify the daisy roots. But, I guess, the most, of course my grandma too. Grandma and grandpa was the time. (LM)

AW describes how the life-learning story that his mother tells him guides him through his life and helps him stay strong. He shares this story with others.

So, yeah, there are certain stories that stood out. That one really helped me, you know, the one with my mom explaining my hair in that way. That’s something that I share with a lot of kids and makes a lot of sense to me as an adult. That’s what, I think, helped me the most during my schooling honestly, because of that one day in my mom’s bathroom in Cox, RI before they got separated. I remember it clearly. I will never forget it, life-changing lesson. It was really quick and easy. I’m sure she had no clue at that time. I brought it up many times. I don’t know if she remembers it. But, I’ll never forget it, live by it. There were a lot of stories. That one I know for a fact that really helped me changed my life; there were a lot of cultural stories.

AW discusses his relationship with his father, the separation of his parents, and subsequently moving to another state, which occurs while he is in high school. He notes there is more diversity at his new location and he is able to make friends easily.

I came up here. My parents separated. When I came up here, you know, not having my father beat my ass like he was pretty much on a daily basis when I was there. Making new friendships totally different environment, you know, a lot of diversity, a lot
ethnicities, friendships were easy to establish and keep. But I stayed up here once my mom separated. Started my own families up here and what not, which stayed. (AW)

He describes the effects of his relationship with his father and the subsequent relationships with his own children.

My parents, you know, my dad, you know, all the loving stuff, he beat us. He was physical with us, forcing us, always talking down, like you’re never doing good enough. He hardly ever gave that praise that you need. Thank you; you’re doing a good job son; me, always praising my children.

AW reflects upon honesty in his culture and his relationship with his brother. “If I know you are capable of lying to me, even it’s a subtle lie, even it’s a subtle lie, if I know you are capable of lying to me. I cannot trust you. I’m afraid of you because that’s bad. In our culture, that’s just the worst thing you can do” (AW).

In our culture, you know as a person today, like, I try to be open with people. You may not want to hear this truth but I’m goin’ tell you the truth. Whether, you like it or not. Man, it just, just cringes me how many people lie. How many people think it’s harmless, you know. If you’re my brother, why do you need to lie to me, you know. “You don’t even realize your lying half the time. You don’t realize, clearly don’t realize how horrible your lie is to me, you know.” (AW)

Family bonds are very important in the indigenous culture according to LS. She discusses her parents’ early years of marriage and attributes their subsequent divorce as a result of the lack of family support due to the great distance from the extended family.

I talk to my own mother daily, sometimes several times a day (laugh). So, I just can’t even imagine, that’s not something that’s part of our culture. I can’t imagine not having those people with me. I really can’t imagine, moving far away and staying far away. But, sometimes we move. Um, I was actually born, even though both my parents are from RI. I was born in Spokane Washington because my father was in the air force and so my mother and my father were out at the Fairchild Air Force Base and I was born at the Sacred Heart Hospital, don’t remember it. We moved back when I was two. But, I look at it, they didn’t quit make it. The got divorced shortly after I was two. I think being away was probably why they didn’t make it because we’re very strong in family. They were way out there without that support system, which I think is really, really important. Yeah,
and they were young (laugher). My mom had me young. So, I think between all that makes that difficult.

**Teacher-Student Relationships.** LM believes his educational journey in non-indigenous schools as having “a lot of pressure, a lot misunderstanding.” He describes how his teachers treat him because of his cultural traditions and the effects upon him.

So, these are the kind of things. I just remember always trying to fit in. I think that and I know that it affected my education and the choices that I made and how we were treated by the teachers. They would call us names and my hair much like my sons were. It was a lot longer because that’s part of our tradition to grow our hair long. Some of the earlier memories of teachers pulling my hair and wondering why I wouldn’t cut it and making fun of us. These are the teachers. So, it was a hard time. It wasn’t a pretty childhood as I recall (LM)

He relates a positive experience in college and how he connects with the teacher and shares his subsequent learning.

When I took Native American studies at Quinsigamond, the professor, a great guy, ‘DG’, he laughed, he said, “You should be teaching this class.” I said, “Probably, but I’m always willing to learn. I can never learn enough, so I want to hear how you’re teaching.” He did a great job. I pretty much did help teach the class. But I learned many things along the road too there, because most of my studies throughout the eastern peoples, throughout Quebec, and the northeast, I had the chance to learn about other stories of tribes out there that I don’t really get to touch as much because there is so little done on here. But it was very enlightening. I pursue a lot of that learning too because they’re very similar too, the stories, just the geographics have just changed, the geology’s changed. The stories are very similar of how, you know, people come in, you know, you serf their land, discrimination, you know, suffering dying, you know. It goes on and on. (LM)

AW reflects upon his teachers and describes the connections that are needed to have a good relationship with them.

Schooling it was a disconnection with either the teacher was or your relationship with them was either good or it wasn’t. It’s not that it was a bad relationship. It was just chemistry like with a love life, you know, it’s either there or it’s not. (AW)
AW believes that the majority of his teachers do not care about him and they do not make any effort to understand his differences.

My teachers didn’t give a shit about me. They demonstrated that time and time again. I’d tell them, “Hey these kids are pickin’ on me, calling me, “long haired, sissy queer faggot. Can you do something?” “Well, what the hell are you doing in the boys’ room anyway? The girls’ is across the hall.” This what my teachers said to me. They defended their position, when my dad comes in says, “Well, he maybe your hero, but he’s not ours. So my teachers pretty much expressed throughout, very few of them said, “No, we do understand ‘A’ is different and we’re willing to work with that. I mean, grant it, I was a rebel and I probably made it hard for every teacher that worked with me, most likely. But, I mean, it was pretty obvious that a lot of my teachers didn’t give a shit, about who I am or my differences or try to promote that. (AW)

He tells the story of his favorite teacher that he has in elementary school and describes the connection that he has with him.

There were certain, Mr.’W’, he was in my elementary school in 3rd or 5th grade. But, I think he was our math teacher or homeroom, whatever it was. It was in his class we were in, when we had to stand for the pledge of allegiance. That was always awkward and uncomfortable. But, then he would put on a record, “Leader of the Pack” every morning. “Leader of the Pack”, vroom…. vroom (laugh), that little bit of fun in his classroom. I shed so many tears, when that man passed away. I was still young. He was a cool teacher. (AW)

AW, as an adult, reflects upon why he thinks his teachers ‘Mr. W’ and ‘Mr. T’ are “cool” and why he feels comfortable with them.

To reflect now, I didn’t even realize until you, its kind of coming into focus. When I’m in schools, I always take the time to show my appreciation to any male that I see in that school, usually it’s the principal, maybe it’s the gym teacher or he’s just the custodian. When I see guys in those roles, particularly teaching roles. I always take the time to make the point, “I’m glad you’re here. I don’t know if many people tell you.” Women bus drivers, mothers are getting them off to school. Father is probably at work; probably don’t see him at home, may not get to football or soccer practice. These women get a lot more opportunity to show kids that women care about them. They probably didn’t have nearly as much of a male role, male figure to show kids that males care about them too. “So, I’m glad you’re here, glad you’re doin’ your job. Whether you’re getting paid
enough or not, I want you to know, I appreciate it, as a parent, as a fellow man.” Maybe
that’s why Mr. ‘T’ stood out. Maybe that’s why Mr. ‘W’ stood out. I don’t know. I didn’t
think about it to now. I know it’s something that I’ve noticed since I got older and had
kids and cared about them. (AW)

AW discusses some positive connections he has with some of the teachers during his
educational journey up through high school.

Through or even up into high school there were some teachers. I don’t want to miss his
class. I get a lot out of it when I can. He’s cool. I get along with him, some classes, it’s
boring, the subject matter is boring. I’m not interested in this.

LS describes having many positive relationships with her teachers throughout her
educational journey. “I had some great teachers” (LS). She particularly loves Mrs. ’B’ because of
her caring and nurturing way, which makes LS feel very special.

In 5th grade, I had Mrs. ‘B’, loved her. I don’t know though what I learned. I don’t
remember her for the education. Of course, education was happening and we were
learning things. But, what I loved about Mrs. B, she was very good for people’s self-
esteeom. She was very loving, and caring, and nurturing. She made every student feel they
were the best student in the world and that they were special in some kind of way. (LS)

LS reflects upon her 7th grade English teacher who has the greatest impact on her. Mrs. ‘E’
helps her gain the confidence to be a reader and a writer. Before having this teacher, she doesn’t
believe she is much of a reader or writer.

My teacher that stands out the most to me was Mrs. ‘E’; I had lots of teachers that I liked.
I didn’t dislike anybody really. But, Mrs. ‘E’, I think, was pivoted cause that was the year
I owned being a reader and a writer.

LS describes a negative experience she has with a science teacher while she is in high
school. She believes that the teacher doesn’t think she has done her homework and comes across
with a negative attitude towards her.

So, I go over to him and um, he proceeds to give me a riddle, cause, basically I figured
out very quickly, he didn’t believe I even tried to do the homework. So, he gives me this
riddle that makes absolutely no sense, what so ever. The homework makes no sense at all and neither does this riddle. I marched right out of there and into the guidance counselor’s office and I switched from the ‘A’ level class to the ’B’ level class, cause, I felt that he was going to fail me. Now, whether that he was just pompous and condescending in general or whether that was a racial thing, again, the only brown person in the classroom. I pretty much spent my life that way being the only. Um, I felt the way he talked to me was really rude and condescending and frankly obnoxious. It could have been a feminine thing. It could have been a cultural thing. It could of just been that he thought he was too good to be teaching high school science and had this attitude, I don’t know. But, it was negative. So, I left that class, you know. (LS)

**Intimacy.** Developing consequential relationships may or may not be a factor during adulthood for the indigenous participants. The formation of these relationships could help the individual transform during the developmental stage of intimacy.

I met her in a supermarket. I was shopping, literally shopping. We’ve been married nineteen years. We have four children. I’m a grandfather. My oldest daughter she is 22 now. When I met my wife she had a little girl. I adopted her as my own and then we had 3 boys. (LM)

When I came home and went to URI, I was dating native people from the native communities here. I married someone from Narragansett, my husband, ‘R’ was also drilled into my head, marry native and drill it into my own kids’ heads because not that I don’t think other people aren’t worthy people. (LS)

Others may not be able to find someone so easily and it becomes a struggle to find one who has similar cultural experiences in which one can identify with. “I try to find native women. I can’t have a kid questioning who they are” (AW).

I have to find a native spouse. Needless to say, its left me single for quite awhile, not a lot of natives around here, within our tribe there’s only so many that I’m not related to. I’ve been there, done that. (AW)

The Navaho girl that I’ve been seeing, she’s got a lot of beliefs that are very different from ours. If we had kids, I would need to help them understand that. Those things are important. That’s just what appeals to me as a person who knows their culture, appreciates it, if not lives it. Those are the things that are attractive to me in friendships or relationships in general. (AW)
Summary

The indigenous participants experience relationships in different ways. Social identity and close bonds can be difficult to establish or they are able to find new friends easily. But, finding friendships easily many times leads to superficial relationships. The formation of deep and significant relationships may or may not affect intimacy in adulthood. This could be resolved by establishing relationships with other kids from other cultures who share in their experience of diversity. The participants seek positive self-identity through diverse, indigenous family, and non-family indigenous relationships. These relationships are strong and help support the participants during challenging times.

Relationships with teachers may affect the participants’ educational experience. The participants describe positive and negative teacher-student relationships. These experiences may or may not affect the academic performance of the participants.

Theme: Identity

Language. The use of language is expressed in different ways among the participants. The categories that emerge from the stories are cultural identity, colonization, survival of the language, and future cultural identity. Language is an integral part of the individuals. It identifies who they are through their connections to the land, which is apart of their past, present, and future.

Language and Cultural Identity. The participants describe how they are able to identify with their culture through their language and make connections to the land and their history.

I speak better English, but I identify more with the Nipmuc language, because that is what really defines everything that I am and where I come from, you know, and my connection to the land. For example, the word Massachusetts, and Ponca Pog, and Connecticut, those are all Algonquin words in my language. Quapaws, Quinapog, Wamasset, Quikumumonochochog (Chaubunagungamaug), which is the place up the road,
Oxford. Those are all words that are intrinsic to my being. So, I identify more with that. (LM)

The language is very important. Any person that I’ve talked to is cultural, you’re language, between your language and the land. There’s a lot embedded in your land is like, I need clams. I don’t hunt buffalo. So it dictates who you are as a native person. As far as your language, there’s so many built into it, you know. Like, one of the examples, she explains, I think, “ahke” is land, my land. There’s nothing that says your land, or his land, or her land. You can’t separate yourself from the land. (AW)

Language is very important. Our language is part of who we are. Um, it’s just as much apart of who we are as this landscape that we’re from. We’re indigenous because of where we are from all our life ways, the foods we eat, the materials that we use for traditional objects in this modern world, which we call art and is our traditional historical world, which were necessities, baskets, and matt, and our home. All of those things stem from the land. So, does our language. (LS)

Cultural identity enables the participants to express their indigenous values, beliefs, and cultural spirituality.

Our language is based out of who we are as indigenous people. There are things you can’t say in English, that you can say in Narragansett and mean something. You can’t translate it properly in English. So, part of who we are our vitality, apart of our essence of who we are is from that language. So, it’s important for us to speak our language and to um and to pray in our language and have that connection to the language. So, I feel it’s important for us to continue that. (LS)

**Language and Colonization.** LM tells the story of his great-grandma and how her parents were not allowed to speak their language or teach it to her as a result of colonization.

They were forbidden to teach her the language. So I said, “What’s that about?” ‘L’s parents, now we’re talking my great-great-grandparents, in order for them to go into town and find work or do anything viable, they were not allowed, didn’t want to hear them speaking their language. They were forbidden to speak it in public. So they did not want to pass down the Algonquin language to their kids. The only time they would speak the language was when ‘L’ was sleeping and the other kids. (LM)

LM describes how his language is able to survive colonization accidentally through the creation of the first Nipmuc bible.

Nipmucs were on the first reservations in New England and they were Christianized, their hair was cut, put in English clothes. So John Helliot what he had to do, he spoke
Algonquin perfectly, so he created a bible and a book with Nipmuc and English. Actually, by accident, he helped preserve our language. So with his documents and some other documents that are left behind, we’re actually able to save our language, by actually, him trying to destroy it, you know. The Nipmuc bible is actually the first bible translated from native to English on the continent of United States. (LM)

**Survival of the Language.** The participants describe in each of their individual stories of how their language is able to survive for their children. LM tells the story of his great-grandma and how she learns the language and is able to pass it down through the family.

She learned by listening at night. You know, it just breaks my heart thinking about it. That’s how she learned it, learned the words and phrases and learning more and more from talking to other elders, who were going through the same things. My cousin ‘TP’, his great-great-grandpa, ‘J’, the one I mentioned, his great-great-grandfather, ‘C’, was the brother of my great-great-grandfather. His story was similar to mine, so he was able to keep the language through that family line. They all lived around Sturbridge and all that and so forth. So that’s how the language survived, just a handful of people speaking it. (LM)

AW describes the revival of his language through the language project, which will preserve the language for future generations.

But, the language projects started 10, 15 years ago a woman; ‘JB’ got a vision. She’s become a linguist. She took a course at MIT. She’s not only sharing the language with us, she helps other communities, folks with similar dialects. You break down the whole language and understand it. Other people, my dad kind of pulled from one source. The bible, the first bible that was written here. It was written by a Wampanoag in our language using the Roman alphabet, of course, to spell it. We never spelled our language prior to that. So between misspellings certain things, there was only one source that my dad pulled from. Clearly you’re not goin’ to get a full understanding of the language if that’s all you base your research on. That was mainly what he used and what most people were using until she went to deeds, any pleas to the government that were written by us in our language, the bible itself, a lot of documentation that had our language in it. She combined it all, cross-referenced it. Ultimately, created what we have now, which is pretty close. (AW)

LS reflects upon the importance of her language and her role in helping to preserve it.

Through colonization, we’re sort of forced to speak English; it’s the way it is. However, our tradition, which I’m very involved, my mother teaches the language classes currently
at the tribe. I’m on the language committee. It’s so important. I’ve taught language with my mother and with my sister. Then, I had the Nuweetooun School on my own to the youth of the community. Language is very important. (LS)

**Language and Future Cultural Identity.** It is important for the participants to teach their children how to speak their language in order for them to be able to make their own connections to their culture. “I try as much as I can to expose my children to the language and to do as much to help push it forward” (LS). “So, language is very important. I try to use what I can with my kids and they’re learning even more. It’s interesting to see where this next generation ends up” (AW).

My kids, my son, I just found out, my god, he’s working at Plymouth Plantation with my daughter. He’s now working full time with the language project. So, he’s using more terms and words that I do at my age. So, that’s a great sign of our future. (AW)

LS expresses how important the survival of the language is to her tribe and their culture.

We did a survey a couple of years ago about language, our language, and asking people within our tribe whether they felt it was important to know the language. Whether they wanted to learn it. Everyone felt it was extremely important. Everyone wanted to be fluent in the language. (LS)

The tribe is spread out across the state of RI and despite their busy schedules they want to be fluent in their language. “Luckily, for us in this modern world, there are technologies that we’re using to help us increase the fluency of the language throughout the community” (LS).

So, we’re using technology to help us, so some of the things can be sent out as MP3’s on the internet and recording it, videotaping it, so that later points in time, hopefully we can do more with technology and have a platform where tribal members can go and access these things to enhance their knowledge. So, they don’t actually have to go to class, but they can be part of that class so maybe there’s the twenty people who actually go to the class are but being videotaped doing the activities and lessons and the language, so someone at home can do the same thing and participate in it. (LS)
Summary

The participants express how important language is for them to identify with their culture. Cultural identity enables them to make connections to the land, which represents who they are as indigenous people. The language connects them to their tribe, ancestors, and cultural spirituality, which include their values and beliefs.

It is important to the participants and their tribes that their language survives. They want to be fluent in their language and use modern technologies to help them achieve this. The future survival of the language will enable their children to identify with their cultural connections.

Theme: Professional Identity/Career Choice

Personal experience is one of the determining factors in the career choice of the participants. “I’m a passionate teacher and passionate about education. I’m passionate about kids’ feelings that self-worth within themselves. That stems from my whole experience. Frankly, sometimes, when I didn’t feel that and knowing that is part of it” (LS).

I am a writer, a coach, an educator, a performer. I feel I’ve always had a personal talent to kind of share with people. I think given all the things that I’ve been through and seeing what my ancestors went through, I always felt my goal was to teach and educate as a performer with my drum. (LM).

Actually, I work with kids. Again, I don’t know what you know about my background. I do for work, but mainly visit schools, something I look forward to most. I really feel, I hope, I making a change in the world, when I visit these kids. (AW)

They told me stories. I use the stories that I always tell these children when I’m in these schools. Like I said trying to pull out awareness, like I was a kid. I went to a public school like this. It was very awkward for many reasons. But mainly, just that abuse really stands out and I don’t want to see it repeated. (AW)

As the participants tell their stories, overlapping factors emerge as they journey towards their career choices. These include family, personal identity, diversity, and cultural education.
**Family.** LM reflects upon his grandfather’s influence upon him to research the archives for his tribal history.

But, also the most important thing that I learned going back to my grandfather, the elders, and going into places like we are now to the archives. I spent many years of reading, researching history and reading books that are, you know, are elusive to most people. (LM)

This eventually leads him to write and teach others about his tribal history and the missing pieces in American history.

I’m also the tribal historian too, so I’ve been studying my tribe’s land transactions, the history such as the Kings Philip’s War of 1675, which really changed things for us dramatically. You take what they say and you look at historical facts, you begin putting these things together. You come out with an accurate picture of history. (LM)

But I have been told throughout the years that I am very talented. So that gives me confidence to keep writing. So with that confidence, I try to bring forth the stories of tribal people that can benefit all native people and not just native people but benefit the world. Teaching about American history that is really not spoken about enough I think. (LM)

AW explains how his father’s influence impacts him to express and teach others about his native culture.

My dad is the main reason I am doing what I am doing. He did programs. He went out to colleges. He didn’t visit nearly as many elementary schools as I’m doing. If he did, I didn’t know about it. But, he usually asked us to do these educational programs for colleges, whatever. He showed me at a young age that it is important to demonstrate and express ourselves rather than letting Hollywood imagery and books and other things speak for us. So, that’s why I do what I do. (AW)

LS attributes her success and who she is today to her mother’s influence and push during her school years. “But, my mother was a great advocate for my education. So, I don’t ever want to forget that, even with these impacts, she was the constant that made sure I succeeded” (LS).
She describes her mother’s impact of maintaining their indigenous cultural connections while attending a non-indigenous school.

So, I think the real threat through my education, was my mother’s push and my mother’s making sure that even though I was being educated in a modern world way that I was very connected to who I was as an indigenous person and very connected to my native community. Um, that made me who I am now. (LS)

LS reflects on the educational journeys of her children as they go through non-indigenous schools as indigenous students.

Why is it that, the majority kids can have role models and mentors and people that are like them in their class. If you are of this minority group, in this case, indigenous Native American Narragansett kids, you can never be in a class with someone that’s like you. “They know you are related because you have the same last name, whatever. You got to put one here and one here, never get to have someone that you can connect with. That understands you and your perspective and where you’re coming from and your ideology, which are completely different from the mainstream. (LS)

She tells the story of how this ultimately influences her to establish the Nuweetooun School and run the Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum. She describes how the children have their native connections, but they are learning different perspectives as well.

I think, you know, when I founded the Nuweetooun School, people said to me, “Well, why do you want to segregate?” I said, “Well, I don’t think about it as segregating, even though these native kids were coming to this native school because we’re attached to a native museum. We have lots of intermingling of other kids that were coming to the museum that were also intermingling with our kids and getting a different perspective. We had kids from Ireland that came and gave a cross-cultural exchange between our kids. We had kids that came from Bermuda that gave a cross-cultural with our kids and we went to Bermuda. I didn’t think about it as isolating. I felt it as empowering. (LS)

Because if you had asked me when I was eighteen, would I be running this museum? I would of told you, ”No.” If you had asked me at twenty-on, I would of told you, ”No.” If you had asked me at twenty-five, I would of told you, ”No.” If you had asked me in 2000, was that the right year? Yeah, I’d have said, “No.”. But, somewhere between 2000 and 2002, my world changed and that was because I had three children. My oldest was going through public school and I was seeing him go through some of the same things that I
went through, some of the same things that I went through, you know. When, you know, I wasn’t a boy. So, I think he even had it worse than I did. (LS)

AW describes the experiences of his children and other native children as indigenous students attending non-indigenous schools.

When our kids are comin’ home. “We’re bein’ picked on. We’re bein’ attacked.” Some of them are bein’ pushed through. A lot of kids, “I don’t care if you’re learnin’.” Once you’re out of school, where just gonna put you through the motions, you’re not our problem.” They’re not learnin’. (AW)

He expresses the need for the children to learn and share their culture. “They’re kind of there just to, we don’t have an emergent school where they’re learning their culture all the time. Their culture does need to be shared, it’s important” (AW). He describes how this influences him as a cultural educator and performer.

Like, there’s a whole curriculum that goes along with this. So, that before we get to the school, you can teach these kids about these cultures and whatever you want to learn about culture itself. Then you can, you know, follow up with a lot of lessons and things being developed while we were developing our story, our performance. (AW)

LM describes his children’s experiences in non-indigenous schools and the effects upon his career choice as a cultural educator.

But I’ve seen some of the effects that I’ve went through on them of identity and sometimes they don’t know how to address their friends of being a native person. But now a days because I’m an educator, most of my friends think it’s pretty cool and I’m always making sure I teach them. All of my kids, I went to their school and did workshops since they were babies. We came with the drum and I came with my regalia and talked how these are not costumes. Costumes are what you wear at Halloween. We are not playing dress up. These are sacred clothes and things that we’ve took the time to make. They represent our spirituality. (LM)

**Personal Identity.** LM reflects upon the development of his writing and the possible connections to his self-worth, self-esteem, and personal identity.

I have been told that as a writer, we are always self-conscious, you know, and always so deprecating. At least, I know I am. So always like, am I good enough? Am I good
enough? Maybe that comes from other things too. But I have been told throughout the years that I am very talented. (LM)

AW tells the story of a career opportunity he has and how challenging it is for him, as a person, to make his decision not to pursue it.

Everyone thinks I should of gave it my all. I did not act. I was doin’ everything to make horrible performance. I wanted the whole thing to flop. Like I said, I wanted to walk off the set. It was literally one of the best roles I could’ve ever had, probably the best opportunity I ever had and it was a challenge. I got to be true to what I am, you know. (AW)

LS describes how her personal identity develops during her educational journey in a non-indigenous school, which ultimately leads to her career choice.

Sure, well, I have to again, go back to my mother. My mother was the constant that was ensuring that I had a quality education. Whenever the school wasn’t doing the job, she was doing the job on the home front with a tutor or whatever. So, she was the number one key to my success educationally. The impact comes from that because her ability to push forth my educational agenda, while maintaining my cultural agenda and identity, and self-worth, and self-concept has led me where I am. (LS)

The participants reflect upon diversity in their non-indigenous educational experiences within the schools they attended, “If I was in a public school with more natives around, that would have been a different factor” (AW). “There’s not a lot of diversity and that’s a negative impact. I felt that growing up, that negative impact of not a lot of diversity and not a lot of people that were like you” (LS). LS describes how this influences her teaching career.

Some people always said to me, “You drive all the way to Newport?” I loved that because I worked with native kids, Hispanic kids, Asian kids from all different walks of life. That was empowering as an educator to know that I impacted their lives in some way. (LS)

LM tells the story of writing about diversity in his column and his young cousin’s experience in a non-indigenous school.
In one of my columns that I was writing about this, there have been big strides to make diversity throughout schools, but Latino, African, but there’s nothing for native people. That’s the big lacking issue. One of my cousins, ‘K’, his son ‘J’, he’s about 12 now, his teacher was telling him there is no more Nipmucs. The kid’s sitting in class and the poor kid had to listen to that.

**Cultural Education.** The participants’ career choices provide them the opportunities to teach others about their native culture through cultural education, while at the same time enabling them to maintain connections to their indigenous communities.

We are known as the Quabbin Lake Singers. We’ve traveled throughout the east and Canada sharing our tribal music. Every time, I go somewhere all over, it is a chance to talk about my people and where we come from and pass on information on who we are as Nipmuc people. (LM)

Writing was a way to propel everything that I have been doing musically and performance wise. It really put it in another format where I think I wanted to bring it to the next level, to educate and entertain at the same time. I always like to say teach people by accident, so they are caught up in the story and not realizing they are learning a history about Nipmuc people. (LM)

I’ve been self-employed just doing, what I consider cultural education, in various forms, acting, speaking, performing, lot of different ways to teach, pretty much all-cultural education that I’m doing. (AW)

I love my job because I’m connected to the native community and native issues all the time, through the art, through the humanities, through what you do in a museum, educate cultural educators. I’m always able to work on projects, even if you’re writing a grant. It’s still about a project that is related to the native community. (LS)

**Summary**

The participants tell the stories of their personal and educational experiences in non-indigenous schools. As a result of these experiences, their professional identity emerges and they choose to teach others about their culture through cultural education. They accomplish this through careers that include history, writing, teaching and performing through the arts, teaching in an indigenous school, and running a native museum. Through cultural education, they can
help others learn native history, empower their children, connect with their native community, and bring about understanding of cultural diversity.

**Chapter 6: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

We see our present with as little understanding as we view our past because aspects of the past, which could illuminate the present, have been concealed from us. This concealment has been effected by a systematic process of miseducation characterized by a thoroughgoing inculcation of colonial values and attitudes - a process which could not have been so effective had we not been denied access to the truth and people without a sense of history. We adept the present as given, bereft of historicity. Because we have so little comprehension of our past, we have no appreciation of its meaningful interrelation with the present.

- Constantinom 1978, p.66.

The researcher went into the study to access information concerning experiences of the formal education of the indigenous participants. According to Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed (1973), formal education is controlled by the state in which there is organization within an institution and has grades that are done chronologically. As a result of the study, the researcher has learned that this is a Western definition of education and is a different perspective that is held by the participants in the study.

The participants relate many times in their stories of spontaneous learning within their indigenous environments outside of their formal educational experiences such as going to pow-wows and learning about braiding. Coombs et al. (1973) notes that in informal education there are interactions with the environment, which are spontaneous and unorganized. The participants express that these spontaneous environments provide rich learning experiences for them as they fondly recollect these positive memories. These informal learning experiences affect the participants’ lives and the choices they make during their adulthoods as they bring their cultural knowledge back to all cultures through alternative education. This study describes how the indigenous participants perceive their educational experiences in non-indigenous schools. The
participants’ stories relate the many trials and heartaches as they search for identity in their educational journeys. But despite these hardships, the participants are able to find resolution by turning their negative experiences into positive ones to help others, not only in their native culture, but in other cultures as well.

Several conclusions can be made from the interpretations of the participants’ unique stories. These are informed in the literature and data with implications and recommendations for further research in this field of study. The current literature is founded in theories of modern identity theories and as a result of the data that emerged from the study; there was a need to search for modern theories and beyond, which include literature on indigenous knowledge.

The research question that guides this study:
What is the experience of indigenous students who are transposed into a non-indigenous educational environment?

Chapter 6 will present the interpretation of the data from the stories of the participants to answer the research question. This interpretation will explain the conclusions from this study, which may or may not be supported by the literature. Implications and suggestions for further research will also be discussed.

**Interpretation and Findings**

According to Reynar (1999), Western individual human awareness was described in Descartes’ statement, “I think, therefore I am, which was replaced by “I belong, therefore I am.” The individual was replaced by the participation in life through the contribution to family and community welfare “as the primary source of human identity (Masamba Ma Mpolo cited in Augsberger, 1986, p.79). Sir Francis Bacon is credited for bringing about reason over imagination, along with Descartes and Newton, who through science and technology brought
about changes in the world that gave way to European civilization having the power to control nature and all natural phenomena (Semali et al. 1999).

In modernity, emphasis is placed on scientific reasoning, which the literature notes began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the Scientific Revolution, or as it is sometimes referred to as the Age of Reason (Semali et al. 1999). It is imperative that we should understand that this affects all institutions, including education. Modernity versus traditional are described in the literature, with the emphasis on modernity, as preparing students through scientific reasoning for economic advancement in today’s world modern world (Semali et al. 1999). Modernity may be one way to view the world, but it is only one view among other cultural perspectives.

Semali et al. (1999) state that if we ignore the process of examining identity formation through oppressive forces, we will become blind to our and other peoples’ place in history and will become vulnerable to the perpetuation of social domination. There is a need to examine other cultural perspectives if we are to understand how this affects children’s identity and subsequently understand how they will succeed in school. One way to do this in this study is to retell the stories of the indigenous participants’ educational experiences in non-indigenous schools. These stories are continuous in nature and will show connections through the retelling of the past, to understand the present, and their possible future effects. As the participants reflect upon their stories, they are now able to see the continuity of the past, present, and future.

**Multiparadigmatic Perspectives of Identity**

When looking at the data it became clear that more than one perspective would be necessary to understand the many identity facets of the Native American participants. The Native American participants are dealing with identity not only on a personal level, but are trying to transfer this identity to the larger social and cultural group of American society. The
values they learn within their culture may come in conflict with the mainstream culture (Markstrom, 2010). Traditional views of identity may not adequate for understanding indigenous identity. As a result, the study of Native American identity could be viewed from different multiparadigmatic perspectives.

Mead (1988) believes in the perspective of a psychosocial viewpoint of identity as the conception of self, or to understand the self through reflection along with the ability to perceive oneself through someone else’s viewpoint. According to Markstrom (2012), the writings of Erikson (1950, 1968) concerning identity formation in adolescence and Marcia’s (1966) identity status perspectives articulate that identity occurs during developmental stages of the personality, but are also affected by the socio-cultural environment in which it is formulated.

Erikson was concerned with formation of identity with the individual making choices in response to one’s socio-cultural, institutional, and historical realities (Penuel & Wertsch 1995). Erikson (1996) proposes that the development of self comes about through psychosocial tasks of development during psychological stages, in which the individual needs to solve a dominant psychosocial task at each stage of development. The solving of this task may come about positively or negatively contributing to personality development throughout the life cycle. These tasks are: trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. identity diffusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. self-absorption, and integrity vs. disgust, despair.

Marcia’s perspective of identity, which is based on Erikson’s work, describes four states of identity: identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement (Marina, 2011). Marcia’s (1966) is not as concerned with the socio-cultural aspects of identity formation but more towards the responses and choices of the individual to one’s particular circumstance.
Vygotsky’s perspective to the approach to identity is the understanding of how socio-cultural process affect identity formation through the use of contextualized and mediated tools in mental functioning during social activity and not in the individual’s choices (Penuel et al. 1995). Erikson was more concerned with the individual response and choices within the socio-cultural environment (Waterman, 1988).

Vygotsky believed that through the external environment, individuals internalize social practices through psychological tools and signs from practices in one’s culture, which mediate one’s actions (Penuel, 1995). Vygotsky (1981a) noted, “a sign is always originally a means used for social purposes, a means of inducing others, and only later becomes means of influencing oneself” (p.157). These tools and signs such as language are important as “resources in action” (Markstrom, 2010, p 86). For example, the participants describe the importance of their Native American language as representation of who they are as people, which connects them to their land. Vygotsky (1934) describes this as “mediational means or cultural tools” (p. 86) and their use by individuals contributes to the relationship between oneself and others by the means of “communication, social contact, influencing surrounding individuals” (p. 45).

Erikson and Vygotsky’s perspectives of the socio-cultural approach to identity show the socio-cultural processes and the functioning of the Native American individual as “existing, irreducible tension (Markstrom, 2010). A combination of Erikson’s identity formation through the participants’ individual choices in their socio-cultural realities and Vygotsky’s socio-cultural approach through psychological tools and signs from practices in the participants’ culture will be utilized in the interpretation of Native American identity in this study. An alternative perspective will also be examined in the study that includes the psychosocial developmental stages and the
experiences of dealing with the conflicting effects of colonization upon the participants and society’s mainstream values.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Native American Self-Identification

Figure 6-4 Conceptualization of levels of American Indian identity according to type and dynamics and sources of influence.
From Markstrom, 2010

Figure 6-4 provides a guide in understanding the many unique and complex facets of Native American self-identification and identity, along with influences at the local cultural/ethnic, national, and global levels. The influences upon identity at each level are interactive as depicted by the directions of the arrow. The local level is represented by cultural/ethnic identity. The literature describes ethnic identity as cultural identification at the
local level (Markstrom, 2010). The terms cultural and ethnic identity will be used interchangeably in this study. The component of self in personal identity is individual (Schwartz, 2001) in nature as opposed to self in cultural identity as encompassing what is shared at the social level (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Self-identification in cultural identity (Phinney et al., 2007) identifies one with a culture or tribe and is extremely important for Native Americans (Horse, 2001; Pewewardy, 2002). Self-perception is an inseparable element in cultural identification for Native Americans (Horse, 2001).

The indigenous participants share their sense of self-identification in stories through their narratives. Tomkins’ (1979) states that we share the experience of which we are through the universal method of narrative. Memories are often influenced, consciously and unconsciously, along with how they are socialized in their culture during childhood and adolescence (Erikson, 1968, 1980). As the Native American participants share their memories through narratives of conflicting cultures of individuals and social institutions, they must reconcile to the self-different cultural or ethnic identities (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2003). They are making sense of their experiences in their past and present situations. As a result, the participants are making healthy selves and narratives by reflecting upon the connections of themselves and their experiences (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2009). They are able to function in their social environments through the development of a healthy identity or “ego synthesis” (Erikson, 1975, p. 161) by true “ego integration” (Cote & Levine 2002, p.180) of the self and the influences of the external environment, which Erikson describes as a lifelong process.

The self within the external environment is explored in the literature and Erikson (1980) describes ego identity as the self-reflection of one’s abilities within that environment. He notes that identity is not only personal; it is also culturally integrated, “a unity of personal and cultural
identity” (Erikson, 1968 p. 20). Markstrom (2010) notes that cultural identity for the American Indian is identifying with a tribe, the connection between the tribe, ancestors, land, and culture/spirituality, which includes language, history, world-views, values, and beliefs. As the participants reflect and narrate their stories, they express the conflicts in their personal and cultural identity formation. The key in identity formation, according to Erikson (1968), is how native members nurture cultural identity and the amount of validation the community places upon these values. He also stresses, that without this validation of identity, neurosis may develop within the individual (Erikson, 1964, 1968).

Though the participants struggle with personal and cultural identities, they each have strong cultural family members that nurture their cultural identities throughout their childhood and adolescence. They are able to validate their personal and cultural identities resulting in a strong sense of self. The sense of self is apart of cultural and personal identity and self-identification with a particular culture, clan, or tribe is very important to the Native American (Horse, 2001; Pewewardy, 2002).

As the participants narrate and reflect upon their stories, it is the strong sense of self and values from their culture and families that sustain them as they go through their educational journeys. This is especially true in adolescence where they are positively negotiating conflicting cultural and mainstream values from their peers and the media. As the individuals go through their adolescence they choose their commitments to people and ideas. Erikson (1964) notes that commitment is the basic process of identity formation and the free choice of keeping loyalties despite conflicting values is the “cornerstone of identity” (Erikson, 1964, p. 125). The participants relate many instances of marginality in their educational journeys and how difficult
it was for them to fit into social groups. But despite this, they are able to find a “self-made” (Erikson, 1966, p. 147) positive identity due to strong traditional ties with their native culture.

The participants positively choose their loyalties to their cultural values despite the conflicts with mainstream society. Erikson (1966) discusses positive identity while experiencing negative background experiences such as stereotyping. The participants are aware of “dominant cultural ideals” (Erickson, 1966, p. 155) and are prevented from participating in them as children and adolescents, but they choose to make positive choices during their adult years. As they explore different career choices, they ultimately choose careers that bring about their personal identity aspirations for the future back to the needs of their native community, which fulfills their social responsibility towards ancestors, kin and creation (Markstrom, 2010). While preparing for intimacy and generativity in adult life, the participants commit and trust in others in their cultural community and are loyal to their ideology, which finds them a place in the world for helping others for the future (Penuel et al. 1995).
Figure 6-2 Dimensions of American Indian identity at the cultural level.


From Markstrom, 2012.

Figure 6-2 shows equal connecting circles that represent the links between identification, connection, and culture/spirituality in Native American identity. The participants make reference to their tribes many times as they narrate their stories. Identification with a particular cultural group is one aspect of cultural identity Phinney & Ong (2007. They are able to identify with their culture through their language, which enables them to make connections to the land and their history. Markstrom (2010) notes that connection and belonging are ”core constructs” (p. 522) for Native Americans. Fogelson (1998) explains that Native American identity is linked to the land as the place of origin, where life is lived, and ultimately it is the final resting place.
Figure 6-2 shows circular connections similar to the medicine wheel and serves as a metaphor representing human nature in completion with creation (Kidwell, Noley, & Tinker, 2001). The participants’ narrate stories of animals and how they can teach one to survive in nature because they have been here longer than us. They describe spirituality and connections to the land in a metaphoric sense as they talk with trees and water to understand nature and to respect it by not taking too much from it. Kinship from past to the present day may be observed across family, clan or tribe to inanimate and animate beings (Brown & Cousins, 2001; Cooper, 1998; St. Pierre & Long Soldier, 1995). Self is understood according to oral traditions from past and present kin along with the relationships with the inanimate and animate beings in creation (Markstrom, 2010).

The participants reflect on the importance of the oral traditions that are passed down to them and how at times these stories bring them strength and understanding when they are marginalized during their educational journeys. These oral stories are very important to their native “culture, spirituality, and identity” (p. 522) because they teach about the origins of the tribe (Markstrom, 2010). While they narrate the importance of the oral stories that are passed down to them, they describe how they are inseparable from their land, which connects them to their ancestors in the past and brings relevance to their present situations. These oral traditions provide the participants opportunities to connect with their ancestors through history.

There is little literature regarding the role of history in Native American identity formation, but there is some literature pertaining to psychosocial identity by Erikson (1963, 1968, 1980) in which he discusses history and identity formation among the Yuroks and Sioux. (Markstrom, 2010). Connections are seen between identity, history, language, and spirituality (see figure 2 Markstrom, 2010). Basso (1999) discusses stories from the past connecting with the
present and explains: “The people’s sense of place, their sense of their tribal past, and their vibrant sense of themselves are inseparably interwined” (p. 35). Some of the participants relate how language is important to their identity and spirituality as they are able to pray in their own language. For others, language brings a sense of history and pride as the survival of the language is told through oral traditional stories. They discuss that certain words of their language cannot be translated. Vygotsky (1987) describes this as the historical development of a word over time and how its meaning can change if taken out of historical context.

The connections of tribe/kinship, ancestors, and land/place for the indigenous participants contrasts with the independence or individualistic values of the Western culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These contrasts and the effects of colonization and globalization are discussed in the following section.
Figure 6-3 Levels of Native American identity influences at the national and global levels. From Markstrom, 2010.

Figure 6-3 shows the influences upon identity at the national and global levels. The participants’ stories narrate that they live in a greater US society, which is now their homeland. They express though they are a part of the United States of America, they also have their identity among the indigenous nations. They refer to their tribes as nations, which are on a federal level with the United States and they want to pass this cultural empowerment to their children.

Acculturation is applicable when there are two or more cultural influences, which are noted at the local cultural and national levels (Markstrom, 2010). Acculturation “refers to the
cultural and psychological changes that result from the contact between cultural groups, including the attitudes and behaviors that are generated” (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). The participants relate, in varying degrees, the effects of colonization upon them. As they describe their educational journeys, they express the difficulties they face concerning their identity during their childhood and adolescence. These reflections show confusion while living in a bicultural society because non-Western cultures value group identity more than the individual or ego identity (Phinney, 2000). Crises in the “identity status paradigm” may be the key in defining identity in Western cultures but in the Native American culture “connections and social responsibility” are more highly valued (Markstrom, 2010).

The Harvard Project (2008) looks at complicated residual effects of colonization upon identity formation and history in Native American adolescents as mainstream society pressures them to assimilate and undermines traditional values (Germaine, 2000). “Persecution and oppression” (p. 523) may have some affect on self-image during identity formation among the participants as they journey through their non-inigenous school environments, but they have historical awareness through oral traditions, which is critical to their cultural oppression and identity formation (Kawamot & Cheshire, 1999).

The participants make reference to the effects of colonization upon themselves and their history. They express through their strong family cultural ties they are able to connect to their historical pasts despite colonization. Strong Native American identity is related to “individual and group historical awareness of the past” (Jervis, Beals, Croy, Klein, and Manson, 2006, p. 529). High historical awareness has been connected to high Native American identity or “individual and /or group awareness of the past” (p. 529) in the literature (Jervis et al., 2006). Historical awareness is a priority for the participants as they discuss historical trauma and cultural genocide
in their narrations of the social studies curriculum in nonindigenous schools. Globalization and the effects of living in a bicultural society are discussed further in the following section.

Markstrom (2010) notes that globalization may lead to confusion in identity formation in Native American adolescents due to pressure to assimilate through mixed media messages from a global multicultural environment (see figure 1. sources of influence). But for some of the participants it provides more exposure to a broader society through peers and travel (Markstrom, 2010). One participant describes meeting students from England, France, Ireland, and Sweden as an empowering experience as she travels to other European cultures during summer camps that are arranged by her tribe and the government. Globalization may bring about more opportunities, but not all participants have the resources to experience exploration such as this due to socioeconomic barriers, which may affect identity formation. But, strong cultural traditions and history could further reduce the risks in Native American identity formation (Markstrom, 2010).

The participants relate how many within the tribe show interest in the revitalization of their native history and language even though they live in a bicultural society. The participants are a part of their local and mainstream culture, but they pursue their traditional identities and culture by resisting the dominant culture and revitalize their local traditions (Berry, 2008). They utilize tools of globalization such as the Internet to transmit language lessons to the tribal community members that are spread out across state who are not able to attend a traditional classroom. As a result of this communication, the native language is revitalized, which advances the rights of the native community (DeCosta, 2006).

The participants live in a bicultural global society, but they embrace their native culture as adults and resist the dominating influences of colonization, which reinforces indigenous knowledge and identity (Markstrom, 2010). They relate that at times they have to
compartmentalize their local traditions and are forced to speak English while attending non-indigenous schools. This may be due to hybridization and Arnett (2002); Grixti (2006); Prickett (2006) describe hybrid cultures as cultures in juxtaposition due to globalization that results in an integration of identity that is multifaceted. As the participants narrate their stories, they relate they are not passive recipients of globalization (Fairweather, 2006; Glesne, 2003; Schelonka, 2006) within a hybrid culture, but are actively working through negotiations in the formation of their identities that blend the cultures in their non-indigenous school environments and into adulthood (Markstrom. 2010).
## Table 6-1 Some possible areas of diverging focus in a dual-mode model of education for indigenous communities. From Botha, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous education</th>
<th>Formal western education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A positive and critical consciousness as an indigenous person.</td>
<td>The contextualized understanding and use of western knowledge as one of several ways of knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing indigenous knowledge and artifacts for the promotion of indigenous knowledge systems.</td>
<td>Developing social and technical skills for negotiating modern situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The promotion of indigenous world views, methodologies and ways of knowing.</td>
<td>Mastering, critiquing and developing modern Western epistemological traditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content based in the traditional and everyday activities of the cultural community.</td>
<td>Content that reflects the community’s connection to broader national and international contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The appropriate use of indigenous people and local resources.</td>
<td>The use of appropriately qualified people and formal educational resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A broadly defined learning strategy negotiated at various levels, from the local community to government.</td>
<td>A formal curriculum which takes cognisance of the indigenous component of the education system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The capacity to dialogue and negotiate with the formal component of education.</td>
<td>The capacity to dialogue and negotiate with the indigenous component of education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6-1 provides a framework for the development of cooperation between indigenous and western education. An educational system that recognizes different beliefs and practices in which schools and communities negotiate new ways of understanding instead of one that perpetuates marginalization (Botha, 2010). Mangena (2008) notes, “it is acknowledged that unless there is a contribution to changing the curricula in institutions of learning the indigenous knowledge ethical systems will not permeate through society (Mangena, 2008).

Children that grow up in a culture rich in indigenous knowledge will bring this knowledge with them to the school environment (Hewson & Hamlyn, 1984; Jegede & Okebukoa, 1987, Rice & Gunstone, 1986). The participants relate how indigenous knowledge is passed down to them from their native oral traditions. Semali et al. (1999) describes indigenous knowledge as knowledge that evolves through wisdom over time that guides people in non-Western cultures in the course of their lives and is usually orally passed down to each generation. The participants narrate oral traditions that contain teachings about creation, relationships to human nature, and their social responsibility to the natural environment that include plants, animals, air, water and how these are endowed with certain forms of identity and power (Markstrom, 2010, p. 523).

The participants describe their educational experiences in varying degrees of negativity concerning their school environment. They express indigenous learning may be more positive and motivational if indigenous knowledge is recognized in the classroom. For some of the participants, their educational experience would of been more positive, if they were able to bring their everyday experiences of indigenous knowledge and tools such as the drum, into the classroom (Glassman, 2001). Vygotsky believed that inquiry is apart of one’s culture and tools
from social history determine that culture (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993). Indigenous knowledge may facilitate education by working from the outside to the inside (Glassman (2001).

Indigenous knowledge could be a valuable learning and motivational tool for Native Americans as they bring their prior knowledge to the school curriculum such as “abstract understanding from experience (Semali et al. 1999, p. 84). This coincides with Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development concerning prior knowledge and how a “social interlocutor” (p.11) prepares children for the social community by acting as a mentor initially and then as facilitator during a cultural activity (Glassman, 2001). Vygotsky (1978) describes this, “In short, in some way or another I propose that the children solve the problem with my assistance” (p. 86). This would be the creation of learning environments to help the child master an interest through an activity by social interaction with a facilitator who determines the situation (Glassman, 2000).

Vygotsky (1997) states that interests communicate the organic needs of the child. The participants narrate interests and cultural activities that are important to them. They describe doing traditional activities in environments that they are comfortable in, such as picking berries with their family, beading, or being in the woods or swamp. Though the participants discuss many negative aspects of their educational journeys, they are able to turn to these cultural activities outside of the classroom. Vygotsky (1997) notes these cultural activities of interest are vital to learning in the educational environment. One participant describes the outdoor environment that he is comfortable in is the desert, which allows him to connect to his history and view the land as his ancestors did. He relates that people don’t realize how the building and scheduling are factor in indigenous education. Pepper (1942) describes public education as one that is automatic, which takes place in fake environments that are separated from everyday activities of the students. The participant believes the outdoor environment should be
incorporated in indigenous learning and describes how his tribe is developing a curriculum to include this in their tribal indigenous school.

Vygotsky states that the classroom is a “social organization” (p. 13) that represents the larger social community (Glassman, 2001). The participants relate connections to the larger social community and how this community represents who they are as individuals through their social history. When individual and social histories are shared there is greater communication between students, peers, and teachers (Glassman, 2001). The importance of individual history may be pursued by in a diverse population through peer projects that are self-generated by students’ interest to help them function in a larger community (Glassman, 2001).

The lack of shared individual history is related in the participants’ stories as they describe the absence of cultural tools such as the drum and their negative social studies experiences regarding their social history. Glassman (2001) states that the individual history, social history, and change within the individual are important in the learning process in preparing children to be productive in the community, which is the goal of education (Glassman, 2001).

**Implications for Educational Practice.** There is a need for teachers to have less emphasis on formal content knowledge in student learning. While teachers have certain teaching responsibilities, such as required curriculum within time limitations, an incorporation of informal knowledge that students bring to school with them everyday may be utilized. Incorporating informal knowledge, through a culturally responsive curriculum that incorporates indigenous knowledge across the disciplines within spontaneous learning environments may enhance indigenous student motivation and learning.

Learning indigenous knowledge that comes from individual and social history is not an easy task for teachers. They must be able to obtain this knowledge and produce teaching
strategies that incorporate it into a teaching lesson (Semali et al., 1999). There is a need for the teacher training programs to encourage student teachers to acknowledge and appreciate indigenous knowledge as something that is different from their own conventional knowledge. Indigenous students interface with this knowledge everyday and use it to guide their thinking.

This would be a radical re-orientation of teacher training programs, but a greater understanding of indigenous wisdom, its characteristics, and the role it plays in the lives of students will help teachers learn and see different world views (Semali et al., 1999). This will involve a new approach to curriculum development, which addresses the importance of “everyday activities to all human beings” (Glassman, 2001, p. 13). This includes a flexible approach in teaching strategies that relies less on rote teaching and incorporates critical thinking skills to develop teaching strategies that will facilitate change in the learning process within diverse environments. According to Skinner (1999), we have shared cultural values within our diversities that educators may utilize to teach culture across the curriculum: “generosity and cooperation; independence and freedom; respect for elders and wisdom; connectedness and love; courage and responsibility; indirect communication and noninterference” (p. 17).

Native Knowledge Network (1998) provides cultural guidelines for educators to bring culturally responsive schooling to indigenous students:

1. A culturally responsive school fosters the on-going participation of Elders in all aspects of the school process.

2. A culturally responsive school provides multiple avenues for students to access the learning that is offered, as well as multiple forms of assessment to demonstrate what they have learned.
3. A culturally responsive school provides opportunities for students to learn in and/or about their heritage language.

4. A culturally responsive school has a high level of involvement of professional staff that is of the same cultural background as the students with whom they are working.

5. A culturally responsive school consists of facilities that are compatible with the community environment in which they are situated.

6. A culturally responsive school fosters extensive on-going participation communication, an interaction between the school and community personnel.

According to Heidenreich, Reyhner, and Gilliland (1992), the culture of Native American needs to be a part of the curriculum for it to culturally responsive, which include their knowledge, art, adaptations of the environment, and values. Stokes (1997) also notes that values other than indigenous ones should also be learned. Native American values include respect for elders, people and their feelings, and living in harmony with nature where all knowledge comes from, which include learning about the seasons, stars, wind, and animals (Gilliland, 1992).

A culturally responsive curriculum that relates to a diverse environment may hold more meaning for Native Americans. This would include teaching about indigenous knowledge and culture that eliminates “historical amnesia” (p. 328) of Native Americans within the curriculum (Semali et al., 1999). Warren, Egunjobi, & Wahaab, 1996. Heidenrich et al. (1992) state that learning about Native American culture should also include not only historical, but also contemporary issues such as social, political, and economics that affect Native Americans. This could motivate, decrease drop out rates, and improve self-image because they will see the value of the knowledge that comes from their own community.

There are a number of research studies concerning the results of when a culturally
responsive curriculum is not practiced. According to Belgarde, Mitchell, & Arquero (2002), “Most studies found that American Indian students were forced to assimilate into the dominant mainstream culture, experienced cultural discontinuity, suffered from low self-esteem and performed poorly in academe” (p. 44). When a curriculum ignores the Native American culture, it takes away their pride in their culture and personal identities (Skinner, 1999). The limitations of these studies are the emphasis on the individual as opposed to the impacts on the tribal community as a whole and not enough research is given to the culture and history of Native Americans (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Little research has been done on indigenous “stage theories of human development” (Markstrom, 2010, p.521). Native American cultures have unique world-views that include rituals of passages in pubescence and adolescence and naming ceremonies that have implications in identity formation (Markstrom, 2008). According to the Oxford Dictionary, development is the “gradual advancement through progressive stages, growth from within and formation is “the action or process of forming; a putting or coming into form; creation, production.” Further research may be conducted to understand how identity formation is created as Native Americans pass and grow through progressive developmental stages.

Some research has been conducted on bicultural identity but more is needed extending to the global effects on identity formation. Understanding the formation of identity in Native Americans may provide insight into their unique perceptions of the world and how this may be utilized in the improving curriculum to provide meaningful and relevant learning environments that will utilize their individual and social histories. There has been little research on knowledge production, social history, and cultural identity within Native American communities, which
indicates a need for further research in this area. Globalization presents additional issues for identity formation among Native Americans,

There is little research on the effects of globalization on identity formation in Native American adolescents (Edgecombe, 2004). There is some literature addressing the risks and benefits of globalization upon child and adolescent and identity formation (Kaufman, Rizzini, Wilson, & Bush, 2002); McDade & Worthman, 2004/ Thompson, 2002). But further quantitative and qualitative research concerning the colonization/globalization influences and effects of cultural, bicultural, multicultural, and hybrid issues that relate to the formation of identity within marginalized groups is needed. Global connections among “fourth world” nations without countries and “heighten identity constructions, such as feelings of belongingness and self-and group understanding” (Markstrom, 2010, p.528) are also issues for consideration.

Summary

This study contributes to the thoughts and challenges of Native American identity development and the role of education among indigenous students attending non-indigenous schools. Areas for further research that emerge from this study include: (a) indigenous “stage theories of human development” (Markstrom, 2010, p. 531). In particular, the rituals of passages in pubescence and adolescence and naming ceremonies that have implications in identity formation. This research may be conducted to understand how identity formation is created as Native Americans pass and grow through progressive developmental stages.
(b) Understanding the formation of identity in Native Americans, which may be utilized in developing a culturally responsive curriculum that provides meaningful and relevant learning environments that come from their individual and social histories. (c) Colonization/globalization influences and effects of cultural, bicultural, multicultural, and hybrid issues that relate to the
formation of identity within marginalized groups. (d) Further consideration may include the expression of self across different contexts (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Trimble, 2000; Weaver, 2001), “such as in association with others in one’s kin group or tribe, in broader Indian settings, at school potentially in non-Indian settings” (Markstrom, 2010, p. 521).

There is a need to place identity formation and culture as the focal points in research in order to understand the importance of how our everyday experiences affect our lives. These everyday experiences are what students bring to the classroom everyday and these are reflected in the following indigenous poem.

**I Love Pow Wow**

Beautiful Saturday morning,

Gonna have breakfast on the go,

We’re hittin’ the Pow Wow Trail,

Got 49 miles of road.

Regalia, Feathers and Drum

Packed gently,

Can’t wait for the MC

To call, “Grand Entry!”

To see family and friends

Will be a delightful sight,

And that gorgeous Jingle Dress-

She finished sewing last night.

The sound of the drums,

Heart Beat of Mother Earth,
Dancers move in a circle-
Connecting with their birth.
Dancing for the Spirits,
As we move to the beat,
Touching Mother Earth,
We Pray with our Feet

-L.S.C.M- (2011)
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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies; Department of Education
A Narrative Study of Indigenous Experiences of Learning in Non-Indigenous Schools
Faculty Sponsor: Liliana Meneses; Student Investigator: Kathleen Noyes

Informed Consent Form

Introduction
I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. Before you make a decision to participate you need to know that you can withdraw from the study at any time. You also need to be aware of the risks and benefits of participating in the research study. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form. The consent form will provide you with the information concerning the study. I will also be available for any possible questions that you may have. The decision you make regarding to participate is voluntary and you are free in your decision of whether or not to participate in the study.

Purpose
I am a student in the Department of Education at Northeastern University. I will be conducting a research study to explore adult Indigenous educational experiences as students in non-Indigenous schools. Indigenous in this study will refer to tribal people who are naturally born to a country, who are distinguished from the dominant community by their own culture, ceremonies, language, identity, and history through storytelling.

Procedures
The research will be conducted through an initial interview, which will last approximately 60 minutes. Follow up information may be obtained one week later in a second 30 minute interview. These in depth interviews will be informal and conversational in nature.

Possible Risks
There are no known risks associated with this study.

Benefits
There are no personal benefits from participating in this study. But it is the researcher’s hope that the individuals involved will benefit in learning and teaching others by sharing these stories and possibly bring about change through their voices.

Costs
There are no costs involved in this research study.

Compensation
There is no compensation by participating in this study.

Withdrawal
This study is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime during this research.

Confidentiality
Your personal information will be confidential and will be used for research purposes alone. The researcher will only know your identity; audiotapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

APPROVED
NURBS 12-06-21
VALID: 12-06-21
THROUGH: 6/11/22
Appendix B: Recruitment Script

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies: Department of Education

Telephone Script

Hi my name is Kathleen Noyes. I am a doctoral student in education at Northeastern College of Professional Studies in Boston, MA.

I am looking for an indigenous individual to participate in my research study on indigenous student learning. Indigenous in this study pertains to Native Americans in the United States. Indigenous refers to tribal people who are naturally born to a country, who are distinguished from the dominant community by their own culture, ceremonies, language, identity, and history through storytelling.

You were referred to me by__________, who heard you speak at ____________.

There will be an initial 60-minute interview. Follow up of any additional information may be obtained one week later in a second 30 minute interview or sent in an email depending on individual availability.

The individual should be between the ages of 30 and 40 who have attended non-indigenous (non-Native American) schools as a child and adolescent and speaks English and a Native American language.

This research hopes to contribute to the literature on indigenous education to improve learning and reduce achievement gaps among Native Americans.

Contact: Kathleen Noyes Northeastern University

noyes.k@husky.neu.edu

508-577-7451

Email Sent to Potential Participants

Hi my name is Kathleen Noyes. I am a doctoral student in education at Northeastern College of Professional Studies in Boston, MA.

I am looking for an indigenous individual to participate in my research study on indigenous student learning. Indigenous in this study pertains to Native Americans in the United States. Indigenous refers to tribal people who are naturally born to a country, who are distinguished from the dominant community by their own culture, ceremonies, language, identity, and history through storytelling.

You were referred to me by__________, who heard you speak at ____________.

There will be an initial 60-minute interview. Follow up of any additional information may be obtained one week later in a second 30 minute interview or sent in an email depending on individual availability.