

A Model of American Indian School Administrators: Completing the Circle of Knowledge in Native Schools

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This study sought to understand the perceptions of American Indian educators as they made their way through a pre-service school administrator preparation program at a large, public research university. The Model of American Indian School Administrators, or *Project MAISA*, prepares American Indian/Alaska Native teachers to obtain Master's degrees to become licensed principals or other administrators within school systems of the state and/or nearby areas. The study used the lens of cultural imperialism system (Downing, Mohammadi, & Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1995; Schiller, 1976) to view how these American Indian pre-service administrators viewed their world within the realm of a dominating culture. Data were collected through three focus group discussions based on an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire. From analysis of the data emerged five major themes: *Relationships*, *Outside influence*, *Getting prepared*, *Altruism*, and *Concern for Family*. Interested in finding out whether the *MAISA* program was staying true to its mission, which was to provide a culturally relevant program with an American Indian/Alaska Native focus, we were hoping *not* to find utility in the theoretical framework of cultural imperialism. Although we were not disappointed, we, the researchers felt that we must be ever vigilant in the planning, preparation, and delivery of American Indian/Alaska Native programs like *MAISA*. Our schools and universities often mirror the greater society. We believe that cultural imperialism is found in many areas of our society; one of the major effects of globalization has been such cultural imperialism. Our research indicates that non-traditional programs such as *MAISA* are sorely needed.

Today's classroom is more diverse than at any other time in U.S. history. Schools are being challenged through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act to show through test data that all students are achieving "adequate yearly progress" (NCLB, H.R. 1, 107th Congress 1st session, Sec. 3122 (b) (1),

2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). While we know that schools can no longer afford to ignore the achievement gap among diverse student groups, the law also charges us with leaving no child behind. In the case of American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN), however, there is an abysmal dropout rate of 50-65% in high school (deMarrais, Nelson, & Baker, 1992; Eberhard, 1989), the highest in the nation when compared to students of other ethnicities (Demmert, Towner, & Yap, 2003). It would seem that these students are being left behind. A number of reasons are attributed to high dropout rates among American Indians/Alaska Natives, mostly deficits in the areas of cultural support, culturally-based education, mentors, role models, preparedness among school leaders, and professional development for school administrators. All indicators lead to a conclusion that there is an urgent need for Native leadership in schools and districts serving populations of American Indians/Alaska Natives.

This paper will explore the experiences and perceptions of American Indian pre-service administrators as they make their way through an educational leadership preparation program at a large, public research university. This qualitative case study used information from focus groups to determine how these American Indian cohort students made meaning of their entry and progress through their own administrator preparation program. Viewed through the lens of cultural imperialism, this study may assist higher education entities in shaping culturally appropriate administrator preparation programs within the academy.

Dropout Rates and Risk Factors among American Indian Students

The focus on indigenous issues is critical due to a high dropout rate for AI/AN students, ranging from 38 to 65% (Adelman, 2006; deMarrais, Nelson, & Baker, 1992; Eberhard, 1989). The high dropout rate occurs across all types of schools serving Native students (Demmert, Towner, & Yap, 2003). The most recent data (2000-2001) indicate that dropout rates in the public school system for AI/AN's is still the highest among our nation's minority groups, topping out at 21%, particularly in states with high populations of AI/AN's (NCES, 2003). American Indian/Alaska Native school administrators who possess cultural sensitivity, political awareness, and commitment can work to support AI/AN students in completing their education.

Improvements in closing achievement gaps are being made but there is still cause for major concern, especially among schools and school districts with significant AI/AN populations. With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, states must show through test data that all students are making "adequate yearly progress" (NCLB, H.R. 1, 107th Congress 1st Session, sec. 3122 (b) (1), 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Failure to achieve these goals means that schools receiving Title I funds will risk losing already scarce federal funds if their test scores are not high enough (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2004).

This concern for academic achievement occurs not only in preK-12 education, but in higher education as well. In the state of New Mexico the number and percentage of postsecondary degrees awarded to American Indian students

is well below that of the other two dominant groups in the state, namely Hispanics and Euro-Americans. While Euro-American students represent 42% of all students receiving a bachelor's degree and Hispanic students represent nearly 37%, American Indian students represent less than 5% of this group (New Mexico Higher Education Department, 2005). The outlook for receiving an advanced degree is no better; American Indians receive only 3% of Master's degrees awarded in the state (New Mexico Higher Education Department). This picture becomes worse nationally with AI/AN's earning 0.7 % of the entire number of associate's, bachelor's, and advanced degrees conferred in 1997-98 (NCES, 2003). American Indian/Alaska Natives from our nation's Indian reservations are only one-half as likely as their Euro-American counterparts to persist and attain a postsecondary degree (Pavel, et. al., 1995). The figure for the state of New Mexico falls well below this national average.

Educators must find solutions to problems that exacerbate the dropout rates of AI/AN students and their difficulties pursuing postsecondary education. These problems include cultural discontinuity, lack of culturally-based education, lack of mentorship and role modeling; lack of preparedness among school leaders; and a lack of professional development for school administrators. A discussion of these problems follows.

Cultural Discontinuity. The cultural-discontinuity concept posits that minority children having been raised in distinctive cultures are often thrust into a school system that promotes cultural values reflective of the dominant culture (St. Germaine, 1991). This is the reality for AI/AN children from reservations who, despite living in predominantly Native communities, attend schools led by non-Native administrators, teachers, and staff who adhere to a curriculum that is culturally non-responsive to AI/AN children. The resulting clash of cultures may leave the Native children confused and having to adapt to pedagogy inconsistent with their culture. Deyhle (1989) suggests that a culturally non-responsive curriculum poses a particular threat to those who do not have a strong cultural identity, thus increasing the likelihood of AI/AN children becoming less interested and committed to school.

Lack of Culturally-Based Education. Worthley (1987) explains that individuals within a culture, such as an AI/AN culture develop common learning patterns when compared to individuals from other cultures. Some researchers (e.g., McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, & Benally, 1991) also report that culturally-based education is particularly important for the success of AI/AN students because of the relative isolation and unique tribal cultural distinctiveness (Pewewardy, 2002). In AI/AN communities, inclusion is an important part of education, i.e., students learn by watching a skill, practicing it, and then teaching it to others (Tharp, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 1994). Following on this tradition, learning for AI/AN students would be best accomplished in small groups, rather than in isolation. But instead, today's mainstream schools tend to reward individual responses and competitive rather than cooperative efforts. Such practices clash with non-confrontational approaches often preferred by AI/AN students (DuBray, 1993).

Lack of Mentorship and Role Modeling. Along with culturally compatible pedagogies, continued feedback and support to the students by mentors or role models in the school has also been shown to raise achievement (Weaver, 2000). Because of the small proportions of AI/AN's who graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education, AI/AN students often lack such role models. "The most desperate need of that destiny is Indian leadership for Indians" (Journal of American Indian Education [unknown contributor] 1970, p. 5).

Yet, teachers wanting to advance into the ranks of administrators must obtain their master's degrees and administrative licensure to become such role models. Certainly, some do this, but as we have already noted AI/AN's are less likely to receive a master's degree. Consequently, although American Indians represent nearly 10% of New Mexico's population—and in some counties nearly 75% (US Census Bureau, 2001)—there are very few American Indian school administrators in New Mexico. For example, in 2004-2005, out of a total of 89 superintendents, only two (2%) were American Indian, and out of 652 principals, only 19 (3%) were American Indian (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2005).

Having more AI/AN school administrators in public schools with significant AI/AN populations might well reduce the high turnover rates among non-Native administrators who may have no vested interest in these communities, serve only in a symbolic capacity providing no real leadership to faculty or students, may be near retirement, and who often leave after serving a year or less. Often, this lack of consistent leadership leaves these schools and school districts in disarray and affects faculty morale, reinforcing the implication that these schools are not worth the time and effort. Now with the mandates of the NCLB Act, it is imperative that these schools have stable, consistent leadership from individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to these communities in addition to meeting federal requirements for academic achievement. Chance and Ristow (1990) suggest that administrator hopefuls need to develop cultural understanding of specific tribal customs, traditions, needs, and expectations before assuming a position in an AI/AN populated school. They suggest that such training would reduce this turnover rate.

Currently, some American Indian children in the state of New Mexico likely will go through the entire public school system without ever having an American Indian administrator. Charleston (1994) urges, "There must be Native role models in the public schools" (p. 15). In a time when self-determination among AI/AN people is high, the lack of appropriate role models for AI/AN children and teachers is deplorable and tragic.

Lack of Preparedness. Recent research suggests that not only do administrator preparation programs provide little training for the differential learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Herrity & Glasman, 1999), but school administrators are also unlikely to participate in in-service professional development that addresses these concerns (Davila, 2001). Not surprisingly, then, we find one of the greatest barriers to appropriate

classroom accommodation of English Language Learner/Limited English Proficient (ELL/LEP) students to be school administrators' lack of understanding of the differential needs of these students (Herrera & Murry, 1999).

Lack of Professional Development. The need for programs that provide professional development for administrators is especially acute in many Southwestern states, among them New Mexico. The non-Indian administrators in these states often lack understanding and knowledge of the needs of American Indian students. While research stresses the critical role of the principal in achieving school success, very little research has focused on the role of principals in enhancing the preparation of American Indian students in particular: Few would argue that steps have been taken to prepare teachers to work with diverse students (NCLB, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). However, the preparation for administrators has failed to keep pace with that of classroom teachers.

Native Leadership. Charleston (1994), and Cleary and Peacock (1998) posit that AI/AN students have unique needs which must be met if they are to be successful in schools. For such success to be reached, the leadership in schools must be viewed through a Native paradigm, that is, leadership as fluid and dynamic (Charleston, 1994) and as a practice that can only be defined in context (Bolz & Foster, 1980). As well, leadership is seen as a service responsibility performed by those who are willing and able to provide it (Charleston, 1994). Thus, Native leaders must earn the trust and support not only of school personnel and students, but also of the community. Mills and Amiotte (1996) suggest that graduates of effective preparation programs have the academic background, preliminary field experience, and professional demeanor necessary to succeed anywhere in instructional leadership positions and to dramatically improve the quality of education for American Indian/Alaska Native children.

Theoretical Framework

Some of the debate about culture involves issues of perspective and ownership. In the United States, a country whose heritage includes cultural elements from all over the world, there are a numerous perspectives that coexist and intertwine in our cultural tapestry. We are rewarded with a variety of cultures in this nation, and different perspectives and ownership of different cultural traditions enriches everyone. However, a more difficult question deals with *which* culture represents this country. The United States or any other culturally complex human society may not necessarily share common cultural elements. It then becomes a decision of who gets to decide what those elements are (Miraglia, Law, & Collins, 2006). In the U.S., the debate impacts the way we educate our children, i.e., the manner and shape in which culture reproduces itself. It impacts the way we make our policies and write our laws. In other countries, equally critical and fundamental issues are also at stake (Miraglia, Law, & Collins, 2006).

Culture is often easier to explain as something that affects everyone in a country or nation. The idea that 'how life is lived' is a judgment to be made by

the particular collectivity that possesses this culture and *by no one else* (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 6). This is elemental to the concept of cultural imperialism. “Much of the opposition to cultural imperialism is implicitly founded in the liberal values of respect for the plurality of ‘ways of living’” (Tomlinson, p. 6).

There are those who disagree with this opposing viewpoint and support the implied tenets of cultural imperialism. For example, Hirsch (1987) believes that a greater body of shared cultural knowledge among all U.S. peoples would enhance communication and intercultural understanding. However, despite whichever position is taken, the decision is still a political one with implications about what we should value, what we should praise, what we should accept, and what we should teach (Miraglia, Law, & Collins).

Cultural imperialism posits that a society is brought into the modern world system when its dominating level is involved, compelled, coerced, or even suborned into shaping its social foundations to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system (Downing, Mohammadi, & Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1995; Schiller, 1976). Stemming from a critical point of view, cultural imperialism uses a rather imprecise set of terms to describe the phenomena it attempts to clarify. Tomlinson (1991) agrees that the definition of cultural imperialism is problematic. He thinks we may be inclined to think of cultural imperialism as “*essentially* about the exalting and spreading of values and habits—a practice in which economic power plays an instrumental role...Often the implication is that *these* are what really are at stake, and that cultural factors are instrumental in maintaining political-economic dominance” (p. 3). But, Tomlinson (1991) maintains that any definition sets a sort of analytical agenda, which is, in itself, controversial.

Some of the key concepts of cultural imperialism include (1) *modern world system*, implying capitalism; (2) *society*, a concept which implies that any country or community within specific geographic boundaries will be considered to be lesser developed than the dominating center; (3) *dominating center of the system*, which refers to developed countries or “center nations” or Western power; and (4) *values and structures*, which refer to the culture and actual organizations that originate from the dominating center and are foreign to other countries or areas considered to be lesser developed than the dominating center (White, 2006).

Thus, if cultural imperialism promotes one nation’s dominant values over others, it might well become problematic when there are nations within nations, such as we find in the U.S. Here there are sovereign nations, that is, numerous AI/AN tribal nations within the U.S. If we posit that Western culture is valued over all others in the U.S., then what we teach, how our policies are made and our laws created, may not readily reflect the values of these sovereign nations. Fredric Jameson, a postmodernist Marxist critic, argues that U.S. capitalism, “in the form of huge multi-national corporations backed by the Western media, is (re)colonizing the world. This ‘coca-colonisation’ of the globe is seen to result in a cultural homogenisation as ‘native’ cultures are swallowed up by Western values” (Koestler, 1973).

Background to the Study

Knowing that New Mexico's Native students in schools need appropriate cultural support, culturally-based education, mentors, and role models, the university acknowledged the need for Native administrators to lead schools with significant populations of American Indian students. In late July, 2004, our university received a federal grant of approximately \$1.2 million to prepare American Indian administrators to serve in schools with large populations of American Indian students. The Model of American Indian School Administrators or Project MAISA prepares American Indian teachers to obtain Master's degrees to become licensed principals or other administrators within school systems of the state and/or nearby areas.

Entry into the program was competitive with far more applicants for the limited number of spaces reserved for those chosen for the cohort. Informational meetings were held in various locations throughout the state, including reservations, prior to the application deadline. Selection of participants was accomplished through a committee who reviewed and graded each completed application with regard to the applicant's philosophy of American Indian education essay, application letter and undergraduate grade point average. Selected applicants were invited to campus for an orientation meeting about the program before it started. At this meeting, selected applicants, i.e., cohort members, became acquainted with each other and received materials provided by the grant—laptop computers, books, and other materials.

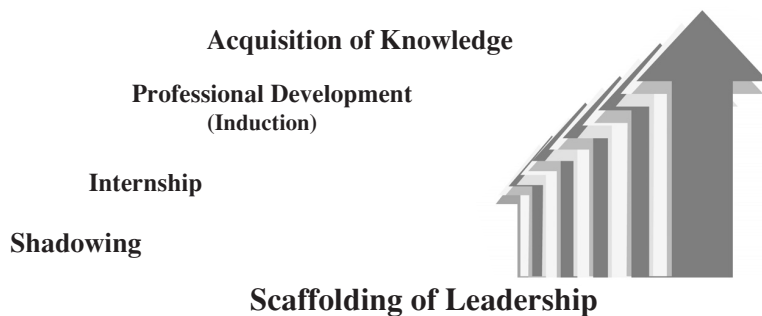
Cohort members began the program in late Fall, 2004 and remained enrolled through the conclusion of the academic program in summer, 2006. The 36 credit hour program for which students would receive a Master's of Arts in Educational Administration provided for courses to be offered at locations convenient to the students via interactive television and on-site, face-to-face instruction from university faculty. In the summers during the program, students enrolled full-time at the main campus, taking nine hours each summer with face-to-face instruction.

Curriculum

The premise of curriculum and instruction for this program was underscored by the concept of reciprocity. We understood that we, as professional educators, needed to learn from our students and the students from each other. Faculty members could not be seen as sole dispensers of knowledge and expertise and the students as passive recipients of that knowledge and expertise (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Preparation for school administration would include university coursework, field-based experiences, tribal mentorship, and professional development throughout the program, including a final year of induction. Coursework revolved around four components: school context; curriculum and instruction using a Native paradigm; culture and language; and assessment. Connecting these components were field-based experiences called "shadowing"

that were integrated into the coursework as scaffolding experiences. These incremental experiences included shadowing, internships, and professional development (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



The professional development of participants was constructed to develop a three-way mentoring relationship between current principals who served as partner principals, tribal mentors who were known for their knowledge of the history and culture of their respective tribes, and the students. Such professional development was also designed around the state's administrative competencies, which were context-based, and were focused specifically on the needs of American Indian students. For a list of all classes and professional development field experiences offered, refer to Appendix A.

Research Questions

Given the needs of American Indian students and the desire of Native teachers to become administrators, the researchers became aware of the need to reflect inwardly to see whether the needs of the Native teachers were being met by the university as they moved through their program and closer to leadership positions. As well, the researchers wanted to note whether cultural imperialism was an impeding factor in delivering the program. The following research questions guided this reflection.

1. What type of support has helped these American Indian cohort students prepare for and persist in their educational administration preparation program?
2. What do students feel has been the impact of the program on them?
3. How do students perceive the effect of the program on their long term goals?
4. What should the university learn from the experiences of the students?

Methodology

Giving voice to participant informants through qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) yields multifaceted findings that guide us to participants' strengths as well as relationships that may be outside the focus of the study (Nicholson, Evans, Tellier-Robinson, & Aviles, 2001). Since this study was concerned with participant perspective, a qualitative research design was chosen as the appropriate approach. Data were collected through focus groups (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Luntz, 1994) using an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire. The focus group sessions were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by one researcher; however, each researcher reviewed transcripts for accuracy. The written text, together with the recording and observations taken during the discussion, aided in the triangulation and interpretation of meaning. Triangulation was also accomplished through member checks (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) and audit trails (Creswell, 1998).

Data from the interviews were analyzed in three stages: first by open coding, then by axial coding and, finally, selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding involved working with data by organizing them and breaking them into controllable units; synthesizing them and looking for patterns within the data; and discerning what was important and what was to be learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Open coding involved breaking down, examining, comparing, categorizing and conceptualizing the data. The process continued into axial coding, which involved sorting and defining data into categories and themes. Selective coding involved developing the story, revisiting the categories and discovering the interrelationships among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As well, selective coding guided both interpretation and meaning, and helped to aid in explanations, conclusions, inferences and linkages, and dealing with rival explanations. The data were then cast against the *a priori* lens of cultural imperialism.

Participants

Focus groups in this study were conducted with three males and nine females, ranging in age from their late twenties to mid-fifties. Participants were from four different American Indian tribes or pueblos. Only two of the participants knew each other prior to the start of the program. All of the participants worked in rural or semi-rural preK-12 schools. Three participants worked in high schools, two in middle schools and seven in elementary schools. Five participants worked in public schools, while seven worked in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools.

Participants represented the entire cohort of students in the program. They were teachers with a minimum of three years experience in their respective schools. Many participants were responsible for extracurricular duties within their schools, such as coaching, sponsoring student organizations, or serving as committee members or chairs in their schools.

Interested in how the participants made meaning of their experiences, we approached them for their consent in participating in the study, guaranteeing them

confidentiality, gaining their permission to audio-tape and use transcripts from the focus groups. Focus groups averaged in duration from one hour to one and one-half hours. Focus groups were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Clarification and follow-up questions, if necessary, were conducted through personal contact with the participants. At the time of this study, participants were approximately half way through their leadership program.

Presentation of Data

After the last stage of coding when the data was complete, we noted that the participants' stories were emerging from the focus group sessions and observations. Five major themes emerged from the analysis. Primary themes of *relationships*, *outside influence*, *getting prepared*, *altruism*, and *concern for family* emerged. All themes are supported best through the voices of the participants. They are related as follows.

Relationships

One of the first themes to emerge was one of *relationships*. Participants discovered that the relationships they developed within their cohort had become increasingly important in their perceived success. Participants seemed to rely on each other for mutual support and motivation. One cohort member noted, "In my case, I like the group. I like working or being in this cohort." Carrying this thought further in another focus group, one participant stated,

I feel that I'm getting there. I can say a lot in my writing...so with the help of everybody, especially with the help of technology, having to make power point presentations, everybody just comes in and helps me, so I just thank everyone in the group for helping me.

Yet another participant commented about how the cohort itself had helped him. He had found himself pushed further than he had been in a long time.

I think it helped because we supported each other because we're only as strong as our weakest link. If you can get to know the other person, you can push them. You can say "come on, let's go." You can help them along to do the work we need to do. If we're all just doing our own work then we're not going to be doing the level of work that is graduate work and I'm pushing myself. I haven't stayed up late, until 4:30 in the morning to finish an assignment in ten years; and I wouldn't normally do it, but I look on the other side and I see [another student in the cohort] is still working. And I think 'I can do it.'

Another cohort member summed up her feelings about the cohort model by relating, "I know that it's been really, almost comforting. We all know each other; we've been together; we're all in this together; we're all going to do it together. That everybody's always going to help. It's been really nice."

So, we find that across all focus groups, participants found the cohort to be supportive. None indicated a problem with the cohort model for their education. Indeed, all members discovered that they could rely on each other for

support they needed. They gained energy and momentum from the group and even learned new things from each other.

Outside Influences

In coding the data, another pattern emerged about those people who had influenced program participants to enter the leadership program. All participants were encouraged to apply to the program by family and colleagues, i.e., family members, principals, or executive directors. For example, one participant noted, “I think my principal had some confidence in me, as far as applying. That’s the only reason she would put it [the flyer advertising the program] in my box.” Another participant stated, “Actually the principal told me about it and the person who is my mentor also suggested that I apply for it. So, I did, because she encouraged me, as well as my husband.” Another participant indicated that her superintendent had sent teachers in her district an email message about the program; and another indicated that her principal had put a brochure about the program in her mailbox at school with a handwritten note saying she should “look into this!” Still, another cohort member reflected:

I think what really made me decide was my mentor. She worked for the district and she said, “You should go for it. You work with Native American children and you’ve already done a lot for them, and this will just take you even further.

Most of the participants had someone external to themselves who helped to encourage and motivate them to apply for the program. However, another participant flatly stated, “I didn’t have anybody telling me anything.” Another participant added, “I just happened to walk into the principal’s office and she said, “You’re the only Indian I know,” and she handed it [the flyer] to me. Then she said, “The only Indian *teacher* that’s here, that I know.” So, although most participants had positive influence from within their schools or school districts, there were obviously some participants who received little to no encouragement from school personnel.

Some cohort members found that their family members had specific influence on whether they applied for the program or not. Participants actively sought their opinions and most received unequivocal support. One participant noted, “My husband, he’s the one that encourages me a lot. As a matter of fact, he is the one who has really supported me in my education over all.” Another explained,

I talked with my husband and said, “What do you think?” and then I contacted my next highest reasoning, which is my father. And he said, “There’s not another opportunity that’s going to come your way like this if you don’t take advantage of it, and this is a great opportunity for you to say, Maybe it’s not just curriculum and instruction; maybe you need to go beyond that.” So, he helped be my voice also. My mother, she has a more aggressive approach: “Well, we all need good principals out here and you better go do it! I’m sick of *my* principal. Take over *our* school.” That was her response and so that was kind of how I went about it.

Another participant noted, "I ran this by my husband and said, 'Look at this thing. Am I reading it right? Is this like a dream come true or what?'"

Therefore, in this theme we find that cohort members were influenced both professionally and personally by family, administrators and colleagues. The commonality was that these sources of influence were external to the self.

Getting Prepared

We also noted that participants felt that each course and each step of the program came closer in preparing them to take on an important leadership role, that of a principal or central office director. They also noted that coursework also impacted their own classroom teaching. One participant noted that "I saw what was going on and what was wrong as far as keeping the heritage language alive...so, I think it has made a big impact on me as far as just within my classroom." Another noted, "Now, I can look at children differently." One participant explained that he had new respect for his principal after going through the material and field assignments the cohort was studying. "Then I realized it was hard for her...I tried to observe her, how she would handle things."

Still another participant in the study explained, "I think I'm more excited to take the summer school experience; it has kind of motivated me for my classroom." Taking this eagerness a step further, another participant commented, "I can't wait to apply the things they've taught us and share with other people." Another participant clarified her intentions: "I'm very fortunate and I want to put it [the Master's degree] to use for what it was meant to be for. That's where I'm going now, straight into that principalship and start making that my own."

Thus, we discover that the preparation the students were receiving was important. It was allowing them to enjoy a sense of ownership of their education and helped them decide how they were going to apply it. Participants were eager to share what they learned and to work with others to improve the educational experience for others.

Altruism

An additional theme to emerge from the data was *altruism*. In this theme, participants indicated that they felt a call to lead other American Indian/Alaska Native teachers and students in education. They felt that Native parents and communities needed Native leaders and they might well be those leaders. One participant stated,

I think I want to take that challenge of being a principal. But my community, as I keep saying over and over, it's a small school, only one kindergarten class. The rest of the students, 1-12, are housed there in the dorm. So, I want to go back to my community as either a Federal Programs Director or administrator with [School District] Public Schools.

Another participant commented emphatically,

I'm going to be the principal and I'm going to go out and involve the community and the tribe and I'm going to be over there every time and speaking for the children. You say get involved with our children's education and do it right from somebody that speaks their language.

Feeling energetic in another focus group, a participant exclaimed, "For me it was like, 'We could do so much more! We could do this! We could do that!'" And still another participant added, "I thought, 'Boy, if I don't make a change, who will make a change?'"

This altruistic feeling was apparent in the data for each focus group. Participants felt the need to provide a better educational experience for American Indian/Alaska Native children, for teachers and all staff, as well as parents, the tribe, and community. The empowerment they felt contributed to this feeling of needing to help others. They felt compelled to act. They needed to make a difference.

Concern for Family

Concern for family members was another theme that emerged. All participants indicated that their families were important considerations in their decisions to apply for the leadership program. At the same time, most all participants were concerned about the amount of time the program was taking away from time spent with their families. One participant pondered,

We have to be leaders in a school within three years, so I'm thinking, "Well, how's that going to impact my family and what's that going to do to me as a husband, a son-in-law, as a father, and how's it going to affect me in my relationships with all those people?"

Another participant reflected,

I'm thinking about my teenage daughter and she says, "You're so busy, wrapped up in your school that you don't have time for me. You don't have time to listen to me and my education and everything that I'm doing within the school." Within this last year, she has said this to me. So as far as my family is concerned, I am really concerned about my teenage daughter.

Yet another participant explained how the program had impacted his family and their plans.

Initially, my wife and I had a plan of work and as soon as the children got a little bit older, we would be able to move back to [another town] so that [my wife] could go back and finish her bachelor program. We may have that on the back burner, but now I'll be in a better position for my family and support my wife when she goes back to school.

So, we note that many participants had concern for how their commitment to their leadership program would affect their families. For some, plans had to change; for others, time spent away from their families caused some anxiety. Most all participants felt that the program had definitely affected their families, but at the same time, participants felt their families provided them support for their program. The conflict was apparent.

Analysis, Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

Viewed through the theoretical lens of cultural imperialism, this study considered how American Indian pre-service administrators negotiated their experience within a dominant culture context. As researchers, we were interested in how the program the university had set up for American Indian students would “look” when viewed against the lens of cultural imperialism. While this lens is typically associated with the discipline of Communications and Media, it also seemed particularly appropriate to employ in examining how one program in educational leadership at one university—an institution of higher education, which often mirrors the larger Western society in this country—positioned itself in relation to the way it delivered an educational leadership program to a cohort of American Indian students.

In casting the themes that emerged from the data against the lens of cultural imperialism, we, as researchers, were interested in finding out whether the MAISA program had stayed true to its mission, which was to provide a culturally relevant program with an American Indian/Alaska Native focus. Therefore, we were hoping *not* to find utility in the theoretical framework of cultural imperialism. From the themes—*relationships*, *outside influence*, *getting prepared*, *altruism*, and *concern for family*—we noted several significant findings.

One of the first things we noted was that all of the themes extended the “self” in some way or another with others. Without emphasizing their own individuality, participants explored and anticipated how their affiliation with others would be defined, perceived, or changed. In the theme of *getting prepared*, we discovered that participants were particularly drawn to the program because of its focus on American Indian/Alaska Native school administrators. Participants were relieved—even content—to be part of a cohort of American Indian/Alaska Native students, where instruction would be focused on American Indian/Alaska Native ways of knowing (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005) and with almost all instructors being themselves American Indian/Alaska Natives. The exclusivity of the cohort appeared to be reassuring. When cast against the cultural imperialism lens, it would seem, then, that the cohort model design endured against a dominating Western cultural influence.

Further, we noted that the theme of *altruism* indicated that participants continued to feel a sense of kinship with their schools and communities. Participants found a sense of renewed relevance in “giving back” to their students as well as their tribes. Their short and long term goals were oriented outward. They looked for ways in which to contribute, both now and in their future. Their sense of altruism, which grew among the participants during the course of the program, was both a statement about and a rejection of some of the norms of cultural imperialism. They remained close to their communities and were determined to return and play significant leadership roles in them.

With respect to theme of *outside influence*, we found that participants were continually encouraged by school district colleagues, mentors, and their families.

Also, the cohort became a form of extended family to the participants, reflecting the social dynamics of most Native communities. Where meritocracy—in the western sense—would normally be favored, these participants were influenced and reinforced primarily by their families, their communities, and fellow cohort members. Rather than enacting individualistic notions of self-internalized competition for a place in the cohort, these participants were supported and persuaded by others, thereby feeling as part of a collective. This sense of collectiveness runs counter to the norms and expectations that might typically be associated with cultural imperialism like competitiveness and focus on the individual.

Regarding the themes of *relationships* and *concern for family*, we noted that participants again looked outside of themselves for understanding their own place in the cohort. Rather than discussing the somewhat competitive aspects of the program—admissions, grading, passing tests, and so on—participants discussed how their relationships with each other and their families were affected and impacted. Their reflections tended to be embracingly outward rather than focused inward, which could also arguably contest the norms of cultural imperialism in this study.

Implications

Thus noting that the research revealed that the program intervention enabled the participants to operate successfully outside of the norms of cultural imperialism, there are several notable implications. Perhaps first among the implications is that consideration must be given to how programs are structured. For example, in this study, there was a conscious move by the department and college to form a cohort made up solely of AI/AN students. Program planners paid careful attention to the existing literature on how AI/AN students learn best and under which conditions. Institutions must have a curriculum that is not only rigorous, but also culturally appropriate, despite any barriers that a bureaucracy may impose. In this research, it was found that although the department and college could not change course names specifically for the cohort, it was still possible to focus on AI/AN perspectives through the provision of culturally based reading materials and assignments, scrutinizing and evaluating dominant Western theories and readings with an AI/AN lens, and having AI/AN professors teach in the program.

Another part of the program worked well and seemed to have a profound impact on the students. They were expected to complete an online class on Mexican educational systems and border issues, and to travel outside the country to the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. There students were confronted with different educational systems and a view of how indigenous peoples in that state of Mexico experienced academic and social life. The inability to communicate through a common language but still able to see how their counterparts' situations were similar and dissimilar to their own had a profound impact on the students. Thus, the students found resonance with not only culturally based educational materials and academic classes, but also in stepping outside of their comfort zones and

gaining a first-hand, broader perspective on indigenous education and issues outside their country of origin. The implication is clear that such comparative experiences add value to Native-focused programs.

Our research study also found that there were some things that did not work so well. For instance, because the students were considered distance education students, they were not automatically afforded the same rights and privileges that on-campus students enjoyed. They did not receive university identification cards initially, which hindered their ability to use the library, wellness center, and participate in other student activities when they did come to campus in the summers. Though it was possible to remedy these situations, it still was an inconvenience for the students and it became a matter of convincing the hierarchy of departments involved that more flexibility was needed. Therefore, the implication is that institutional bureaucracy can often defeat the best of purposes if vigilance and advocacy are not constantly exercised on behalf of Native students and special programs designed for Natives.

However, as researchers associated with an institution in which meritocratic principles are embedded and serve to perpetuate the status quo, we must be cautious in our overall appraisal of the study and its conclusions. Considerable care must be taken in planning, preparation and delivery of programs like the one described here. Cultural imperialism as it is manifested in mainstream educational institutions is a bit of a chimera for them, as well as for the faculty that work within their operational frameworks. However, institutions tend to retain the norms and value systems of the mainstream society. In their absence, there would be confusion and discomfort since the dominant is familiar and favored and reinforces the existing norms of behaviors and expectations. The converse of cultural imperialism—social justice—might seem rather alien or exotic at first glance. Yet, social justice—as it embraces the nuances and dynamics of cultural diversity, as well as equity, access and equality of outcomes for all who would seek educational opportunities—is precisely what is needed to overcome cultural imperialism. A university as it represents a microcosm of society cannot consider itself just without appreciating the background and needs of all of its students and its potential students. If we are to promote social justice in our programs, then we must carefully listen to the voices that have been silenced or are muffled by the dominant paradigm. We must carefully consider the culture of our students in relationship to culture of the program, as well as that of the university, and how these are often inherently in conflict. We must take care in how we perceive our own knowledge and how we transmit it our students. And we must not neglect to examine ourselves in a context of serving a role in a societal system that rewards first those who work to maintain meritocracy. Our goal must be to initiate and perpetuate cultural inclusiveness rather than cultural exclusiveness.

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APPENDIX A

Classes Offered for Students in the MAISA Program

Educational Leadership, Supervision, and Evaluation - issues of leadership, supervision, and evaluation; effective instructional practices in teaching American Indian students.

Bilingual Education Administration - a focus on organizational and leadership theories that foster systemic reform for improving second language acquisition and sustained academic achievement for American Indian students.

Shadowing Experience - *Field-based—each semester*. Bi-monthly meetings with partner principals to understand the organizational needs and logistics of running a school; bi-monthly meetings with tribal mentors for reflection on their experiences and to aid in placing those experiences in a Native paradigm.

Educational Politics and Community Relations - an understanding and knowledge of the pedagogical, legal, political, cultural, economic, and social complexities of sustaining American Indian students' achievement.

The Principalship - a focus on key issues surrounding the role of the school-site leader in serving American Indian students.

History and Philosophy of American Indian Education - a focus on the historical development of American Indian schooling in the US and the relationship between Native philosophies and American Indian education.

Multicultural Leadership - a focus on understanding and advocating for *all* students to achieve higher academic standards, thereby enabling a better understanding of the theoretical and practical issues of relational power.

Public School Law - legal processes of education, major court decisions, and the legislative process; added emphasis on the federal government and Indian Education and the rights of American Indians and English Language Learners (ELLs).

Internship: Public Schools with American Indian Students and Linguistically Diverse Learners (6 hours total, 2 semesters) - practical internships in schools with high percentages of American Indian students and ELLs; supervision by the partner principal and faculty; bi-monthly meetings with tribal mentors.

Educational Financial Management - issues of equity and ethical procedures in school finance; federal and state budget allocations, and federal, including BIA, and state regulations.

Professional Development - Induction Services (3 semesters) - ongoing mentorship, professional literary circles; weekly discussions and monthly seminars with faculty; a structure to enhance collaboration, provide continuous support, offer feedback, and strengthen networking among participants.