

All good roads lead to Concho: Indigenous women, leadership, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho
department of education

by

Carrie Frances Whitlow

B.A., Haskell Indian Nations University, 2005
M.Ed., University of Oklahoma, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

Extending the work of Dr. Henrietta Mann (1997), using Indigenous storywork this study focuses on how the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education has built capacity and asserted sovereignty over decades of time, with a focus on the leadership stories and experiences of six Cheyenne and Arapaho female educational leaders. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and artifact collection, this study was informed by two key frameworks: Indigenous feminisms (Barker, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shanley, 1984; St. Denis, 2007) and Liberating Sovereign Potential (RedCorn, 2020). Key findings in this study include how these leaders in Cheyenne and Arapaho education are building capacity through internal restructuring while growing resources, programs, and services to serve Cheyenne and Arapaho people. Findings also emphasize how mentors influenced their skill development as systems technicians and played a distinct role in tribal program growth and capacity building. Participants also offered varied definitions of sovereignty when discussing how they asserted sovereignty. Additionally, participants shared their gendered experiences as leaders in ways that considered their cultural values, teachings, and lessons, as we all explored how to better understand Cheyenne and Arapaho feminism in leadership. Lastly, the study highlights how every participant has a strong connection to Concho, Oklahoma either through the boarding school, tribal community, or tribal education department throughout the years because *all good roads lead to Concho...*

Keywords: Tribal Education Department (TED), Tribal Education Agency (TEA),

Educational Sovereignty, Indian Education, Indigenous Feminism

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Approved by:

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Abstract

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Dedication

To my Grandma.

Violet Bernice Youngbear Franklin, Nanak'ate Hisea (Light or Yellow Hair Woman),

Thank you for teaching me exactly who I am and where I come from.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1983

I was born March 16, 1983, in Lawton, Oklahoma at the Indian Health Service (IHS) Hospital. I am the daughter of Dara Franklin and the late Billy Joe Whitlow and the youngest of three siblings. My paternal grandparents are the late William Whitlow and the late Geraldine Tallbull-Morton. My maternal grandparents are the late Arapaho Chief Virgil Franklin, Sr. and the late Violet Berniece Youngbear Franklin. At the time I was born my parents lived in El Reno, Oklahoma and to this day it is the only home I have ever known. Prior to living in El Reno my mom was raised in Concho while her parents worked at the Concho Boarding School.

Concho is 7.9 miles north of El Reno. It is the home of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal headquarters, the first Lucky Star Casino, Concho Boarding School, and Concho Agency. I was raised in El Reno, one of 13 tribal communities located in western rural Oklahoma, which is former reservation territory. Because of my proximity to our tribal headquarters, I was able to take full advantage of every opportunity and service throughout the years. Additionally, my life was completely intertwined with the Cheyenne and Arapaho way of life because of how my grandparents raised me.

By the time I was three years old I was attending the tribal Head Start program in the former boarding school classrooms in Concho. My mother worked at the Head Start at the time and I only have good memories of my time spent there. I remember playing on the playground, when Miss Sophie made beans (my favorite), and graduation being held at the tribal complex in our baby blue robes and hats.

I attended Darlington, which is a K-8 rural school that sits right between El Reno and Concho. When I was in 1st grade my mother was hired as a teacher aide and not long after she would be promoted to the Indian Education Coordinator, a position she holds to this day. Although Darlington was a public school, they had a high enrollment of Native American students. The administrators created an environment where I felt supported, seen, and heard.

While attending Darlington, the JOM Program would provide school supplies to us every year. They also paid for end of the semester and end of the school year trips. I remember being so excited to go to the skating rink in Yukon that I would lay my clothes out the night before and could hardly sleep. On the end of the school year trip, we always went to Frontier City and would ride the rollercoasters all day long. Our Title VI and JOM Programs also sponsored an 8th grade graduation trip to Six Flags in Dallas, Texas. These trips were always the highlight of the year for us.

During high school was the first time I was in a public school system where the “Indians” were the minority and none of the teachers, principals, or administrators looked like me. I wasn’t the smartest in class, didn’t test well, or have the highest GPA, but I did enough to stay eligible to play basketball. I didn’t think I was smart enough to get into college, and our school counselor did not take any interest in me due to my lackluster academic performance.

Thankfully, the department of education, under the leadership of Teresa Dorsett and Quinton Roman Nose, were creating opportunities for us to visit colleges and to learn about FAFSA and the higher education scholarship program. The first time I set foot on a college campus was at the University of Colorado Boulder with the department of education. Now that I’m able to reflect on those opportunities, I am so grateful. Not only was the department of

education focused on creating educational opportunities, but opportunities for overall growth and development as well.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes took care of me not only on my educational journey, but my professional journey as well. From the time I was three years old until now as a professional and student, the department of education has provided me with financial services, opportunities, and support to get me where I am today. It is my responsibility as a student, lifelong learner, and leader to do work that will benefit my family, community, and people.

Since I was a little girl, I always knew Concho was a place of gathering. It's where we went for school, it's where we went for benefit dances, it's where we went to visit family, it's where we went to play bingo, and where we went to bury our loved ones, and still do. For the past 19 years I have had the privilege of making the 7.9-mile drive from El Reno to Concho for work. For the past nine years I have had the privilege of walking into an office space that was once shared by my grandmother and my mother at separate times in our lives, but all as educators. The office space I occupy was once a federally operated bureau school and is now the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education.

This is where we continue to assert sovereignty in education and work to liberate our sovereign potential.

2025

Sitting in a room full of Cheyenne and Arapaho educators, tribal leaders, and elders, we are discussing the creation of a Cheyenne and Arapaho charter school. The room is full of hope,

excitement, and most importantly laughter. Dr. Henrietta Mann¹, or Henri as she likes to be called, is sitting directly to my left. After a lengthy discussion we decided to take a 10-minute break. I turn to my left and learn towards her and tell her about my dissertation. “I’m going to continue your work and pick up where you left off in 1983.” After saying the work is needed, she laughs and says, “Do you know why I ended in 1982? I ended in 1982 because I was done writing my dissertation!” She laughs out loud again, as we all do.

Cheyenne and Arapaho Education: A Background

Cheyenne and Arapaho (C&A) people had educational systems in place prior to European contact. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes (C&A Tribes) are federally recognized as one tribe, but both have their own distinct languages, cultures, and histories. Education began in the home, taught by family members, learning through observation and most importantly by listening. Education was used as a means of survival. At the beginning of English education, the intent was to civilize, which meant learning a new language, religion, and way of life. As Mann (1997) shares, “the people ideally expected such an education to make them functional in white society while simultaneously permitting them to remain Cheyenne’s and Arapahoes”² (p. 135). While we acknowledge the long and complicated history of Indian education, the goal of Cheyenne and Arapaho education should remain the same. We should be permitted to be who we are.

In October of 1867, the Apache, Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne, and Arapaho gathered in Fort Larned, Kansas to declare peace with the U. S. government. Declaring peace meant signing

¹ While western academic norms emphasize just citing last names without “Dr.” in front of it, you’ll see throughout this dissertation that I will code switch between saying “Dr.” to emphasize that I know these individuals personally and therefore do this to emphasize my relationships with these scholars out of respect. Prayer Cloth Woman (Ho’oesto’ooná’e or Do’oonah’e in Cheyenne) is Dr. Mann’s Cheyenne name.

² In addition to the use of Cheyenne-Arapaho, Cheyenne and Arapaho, and C&A, the terms Cheyennes and Arapahoes will be used when referring to the work of Mann (1997).

a treaty that promised these tribes food, annuities, gifts, and most importantly education. The Medicine Lodge Treaty stipulated “that all children between the ages of six and sixteen were to be placed in school to receive an English education” (Mann, 1997, p. 136). English education or white education meant looking like white people, thinking like white people, and subscribing to a white work ethic and value system Mann (1997) explains. In comparison, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes have their own way of thinking, knowing, and value system. The Cheyenne and Arapaho have distinct world views and unique experiences that set each tribe apart (Mann, 1997).

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education (CADOE) was created by the C&A Tribes in Oklahoma around 1962 when they began prioritizing education. Not only did our administration believe education was a priority, but they also believed in providing support as well. The department of education was formalized in August of 1977 (Mann, 1997). Since 1977 significant strides have been made by C&A educators who believe that not only is it important to provide support to our tribal citizens, but to regulate the education of our tribal citizens.

In 1979, the department of education operated the following programs: Adult Education, Head Start, Higher Education Assistance, Incentive Action, Johnson O’Malley, and Vocational Education (Mann, 1977). Since then, the department has expanded in size, staff, and funding. CADOE now operates the following tribal programs: Administration, Child Care Development Center, Head Start, Academic Excellence & Enrichment, Johnson O’Malley, School Clothing, Accessing Choices in Education Grant, Higher Education Scholarship Program, Cheyenne & Arapaho Youth Council, State Tribal Education Partnership Grant, and Cheyenne and Arapaho Productions. The department employs 84+ staff with a budget of \$8-\$10 million that includes

state, federal, and gaming revenue funds. CADOE's mission is to support the C&A people in their educational journey with program services from infancy to adulthood in the areas of spiritual, social, and intellectual learning.

Indigenous women's leadership has evolved throughout history, and their roles and responsibilities vary depending on their Nation. For C&A women, historically, their roles were divided by men and women. As described by Berthrong (1963), "... the women's share of the community's labor was care of the household and the welfare of the family" (p. 36). Women's role in leadership was to rule the camps, propel men to necessary duties, and check men when they lacked good judgment. Although their roles and responsibilities can be misunderstood when looking at phrases such as "care of the household and the welfare of the family" through a western Eurocentric lens, and not having much value compared to men, women have always influenced their Tribal nations and continue to do so.

Indigenous women continue to guide and influence tribal organizations with their unique leadership based on the importance of community. Community is defined by Smith (1999) as "physical, political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and spiritual spaces" (p. 125). Additionally, Indigenous communities continue to permeate spirituality and identity within their marginal and isolated spaces (Smith, 1999). Since I'm so familiar with CADOE, I'm keenly aware of the influence of women in leadership in the community; however, nobody has sat down and visited with these women and unpacked their stories of leadership.

Rationale

Tribal Education Departments (TEDs) and Tribal Education Agencies (TEAs) are organizations found within tribal government systems. Their primary role is to support the

education of their tribal citizens (Bowers, 2010). Out of 500+ Tribal nations in the United States there are 200+ tribes that have identified TEDs/TEAs. They are also called education departments, higher education offices, or education committees. TEDs/TEAs are largely responsible for direct services, such as scholarships if tribal citizens choose to go to college. They are also responsible for programs that offer direct services in early childhood, PK-12, and higher education. As RedCorn (2020) emphasizes, TEDs/TEAs are an important part of the Indigenous education landscape, yet there is minimal literature on TEDs/TEAs beyond describing what they are, or outlining profiles of different departments, programs, or partnerships. Not every tribal nation has the privilege to support, educate, or regulate the education of its tribal citizens.

Within the Tribal nations' structure there are several TEDs/TEAs that are responsible for "executing their respective educational agendas (RedCorn, 2019, p. 3). As defined by the Native American Rights Funds (NARF) and Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (TEDNA), tribal governments delegate to TEDs authority and responsibility to implement education goals and priorities (Bowers, 2010). In most tribes, TEDs are part of the executive branch of the tribal government.

TEDs and TEAs are in a unique position as they begin to assert their sovereignty. As they continue to build capacity, they are taking control by prioritizing educating their tribal citizens. This includes learning how to write curriculum, writing standards, creating teachers, and creating our own systems of education. Brayboy (2006) shares, "We need teachers who look like us, talk like us, and think like us" (p. 426). When creating systems of education in a tribal nation it is important to assert tribal history, language, culture, and ways of knowing. Not every tribal nation

has a designated TED, TEA, or education office. The C&A Tribes committed to education in 1962 when they began awarding grants to tribal students for graduating. Since then, our education department has created pathways, opportunities, and access for tribal students pursuing an education from birth to grave. One of the most critical components of the department's growth has been because of the leaders within the department of education.

Since the 1800s the federal government has created policy that has negatively impacted Indian students, families, and communities. In the beginning, policy was intended to assimilate, convert, and civilize Indians into western society. Once the federal government realized the negative impact its policy had on Indian communities, they began creating policy intended to correct their wrongdoings. Within the last 20 years there have been presidential executive orders signed, the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Act, and most recently Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (National Indian Education Association, n.d.).

Dr. Mann (1997) states, "Indian education is a perpetual federal responsibility" (p. 185). For the C&A Tribes that responsibility began with the Treaty of Medicine Lodge which stipulated education would be provided in exchange for land. C&A people agreed to the white man's education because they believed it would give their young people skills needed for survival in a changing world (Mann, 1997). However, The People did not anticipate receiving an education would cost them their culture, identity, and way of life.

As a result, tribal nations lost control of educating their tribal citizens. Dr. Mann (1997) shares, "The elders pray that their children will become educated so they can help The People" (p. 182). What type of education our children receive is what became the issue. What we know now, Dr. Mann asserts, is that white-operated schools are culturally insensitive, that includes the

personnel, curriculum, and textbooks (Mann, 1997). With the assistance of critical organizations like Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (TEDNA), the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), and the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), Tribal nations are now at the forefront of educating their tribal citizens. Not only do TEDs and TEAs provide services that assist students on their educational journey, but they are also taking back control of what type of education our children receive and they are educating our tribal citizens.

Overall, education for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students and Tribal Nations has suffered throughout the years due to conflicting objectives determined by federal Indian policy. While federal, state, and local entities decide what is best for AI/AN students, it is Tribal Nations who prioritize educational sovereignty. Historically, federal Indian policy has sought to “purposefully and systematically worked to eradicate Native languages, religions, beliefs, and practices” (Mackey, 2017, p. 783). There is substantial literature regarding these destructive policies designed to forcibly assimilate Native peoples through weaponized education. Lomawaima and McCarty (2002) affirm, “schools have purposefully and systematically worked to eradicate Native languages, religions, beliefs, and practices” (p. 282). Although American Indian children have been at the forefront of the battle of federal powers and tribal sovereignty (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002), there is limited literature on TEDs/TEAs and their role in tribal education sovereignty.

In 1962, the C&A Tribes did not have a formal education department, but they were awarding \$100 grants to students who graduated from high school, college, or nursing school (Mann, 1997). By 2024, these grants had increased from \$1,500-\$4,000 to pursue a higher education. By 1977, the C&A Tribal Council created CADOE. The purpose of the education

department was to provide a variety of education programs and services to C&A tribal members. CADOE was operating six programs by 1979, most of which were funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). McCoy (2024) shares, “the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEA) of 1975, which formalized the ability of federal agencies to contract with and issue grants directly to federally recognized tribes” (p. 73). These grants are often referred to as 638 contracts that allow tribal nations to administer federal programs for their communities. In 2021, CADOE operated 14 tribal programs, consisting of 130 employees, with an \$8 million budget. Tribal programs are now funded by state, federal, and tribally generated gaming revenues. As of 2024, CADOE operates 11 tribal programs, serves 4,000+ tribal students, and continues to prioritize direct services to our people.

Dr. Henrietta Mann’s work is valuable to the C&A people and our communities; however, her work on C&A education has yet to be fully extended to modern day. As a result, there is an ongoing need to extend our understanding and foundational literature related to C&A education, specifically focused on extending the storywork of Mann (1997) and blending this work with the emerging focus of literature on tribal education departments and agencies, while continuing to fill that gap in the literature. As a C&A tribal citizen and woman educational leader, I feel it’s important to consider Dr. Mann’s (1997) reminder that “each member of the tribe is expected to contribute to the good of The People” (preface). In her book, she shares that this is her contribution to the people which ends in 1982. My dissertation research is a continuation of Dr. Mann’s research which ends in 1982. My study, which begins in 1983, which coincidentally is the year I was born, is my contribution to The People. I have also written articles about CADOE representing programming development over the past decade (RedCorn et al., 2024; RedCorn &

Whitlow, 2024; Whitlow, 2020; Whitlow, 2024) and therefore there is a need to explore the gap between 1983 and now. Furthermore, with the emerging field of Indigenous feminism (Barker, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shanley, 1984; St. Denis, 2007), and the stories of C & A female educational leaders who influenced the trajectory of CADOE have yet to be documented, there is a need to explore the intersections of all these fields.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the leadership stories and experiences of Cheyenne and Arapaho female³ educational leaders in TED/TEA contexts through Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008, Archibald et al., 2019). The study focused on six Cheyenne and Arapaho female educational leaders and how they have built capacity and asserted educational sovereignty through program and department building.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the stories of female leaders working in and with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education that demonstrate building capacity?

RQ2. What are the stories of female leaders working in and with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education that demonstrate asserting sovereignty?

³ While acknowledging the nuanced differences between gendered terms such as “female” and “woman” as it relates to biology vs. social gender constructs, the participants in this study identify with these terms without distinguishing these differences. Therefore, these terms are used interchangeably throughout because they identify as female as assigned at birth and simultaneously socially identify as women in their everyday lives. See more on “Indigenous Woman” in the Glossary of Key Definitions at the end of this chapter.

Research Frameworks

This research was informed directly by two conceptual frameworks, Indigenous feminisms (Barker, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shanley, 1984; St. Denis, 2007), and RedCorn's (2020) *Liberating Sovereign Potential* capacity building model. A critique of feminism is provided by Lorelei Means in Green (2007). Means writes, "We are *American Indian Women* in that order. We are oppressed, first and foremost as American Indians, as peoples colonized by the United States of American, *not* as women" (p. 94). This critique is significant and important because it begins to explain the unique experiences of Indigenous women in the context of broad feminist philosophies. According to Mary Jo Tippeconnic Fox (2021), there is a difference between white women's feminism versus Indigenous feminism. Indigenous feminism is not the same because white women's feminism is about rights, whereas Indigenous feminism is about responsibility (Tippeconnic Fox, 2021).

Indigenous female leaders carry the immense responsibility of their families, communities, and tribes in their roles as decision makers. Culturally, women are regarded highly because we carry life and are often called the backbones of our families, in contrast to feminist philosophies born out of white communities, who are primarily oppressed through patriarchy. In other words, we experience oppression both as Indigenous people and again as women (Tippeconnic Fox, 2009).

RedCorn (2020) emphasizes building capacity and asserting sovereignty in *Liberating Sovereign Potential: A Working Education Capacity Building Model for Native Nations*. RedCorn provides leaders with a framework to engage in work to assert sovereignty and pursue self-determination in educational systems. I utilize this framework to tell the story about a

TED/Tribal Education Agency located in Concho, Oklahoma, home to the C&A Tribes of Oklahoma. This model relies on culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies (CSRP) that have evolved over the years and include sovereignty and self-determination (RedCorn, 2020). As Indigenous scholars we have been taught the importance of our political identity and sovereignty, but as education leaders we often have learned less about the topic of asserting sovereignty. Not only are we defining sovereignty as we lead in these systems, but we also are asserting sovereignty through the work of TEDs/TEAs.

Methodology: Indigenous Storywork

Indigenous storywork is vital to Indigenous research because of the value stories carry within the methodology, as well as counter storytelling (Archibald, 2008). Stories and storytelling are the foundation of Indigenous families, with the concept of *storywork* coming from Archibald's (2008; 2019) approach to research. As Dr. Mann (1997) shared, Cheyenne children learned from the teaching of stories only told at night by keepers of the oral tradition. Additionally, oral literature was divided into categories such as sacred, creation, prophets, tribal history, hero stories, mysteries, war stories, and white man stories. As an Indigenous woman with a traditional family, we were always told stories orally or through song and dance. Everything we encounter has a story or meaning and it is often up to us as Indigenous people to analyze what the meaning of those stories are and how they apply to our way of life. Archibald (2008) shares, "I use the term 'teachings' to mean cultural values, beliefs, lessons, and understandings that are passed from generation to generation" (p. 1). This is how Indigenous people learn and carry on said teachings. Overall, storywork is an Indigenous methodology that is centered on the following seven principles: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, holism,

interrelatedness, synergy, and reverence (Archibald et al., 2019). These will be explained in more detail in Chapter Three.

Methods: Interviews, Artifact Collection, Coding, and Analysis

In addition to an Indigenous storywork methodology, this study utilized semi-structured interviews along with document and artifact collection. Overall, I interviewed six C&A female educational leaders with two rounds of individual interviews. The participants described how our department of education has evolved throughout the years. As an insider in the community, I have personal and professional relationships with each of the participants, which allowed me to go deeper into the content of the interviews more quickly, and I had easy access for ongoing follow up. In other words, I had ongoing access to the participants via email, text, phone calls, and follow up at professional and social events, so data collection was ongoing outside of the interviews.

The benefit of conducting semi-structured interviews in this study “involve[s] the researcher preparing questions in advance with possible probes identified then the researcher usually sticks to the prepared protocol while making room for unexpected directions in the interview if it occurs and is relevant to the study” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127). The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each leader and lasted one to two hours. As mentioned above, due to my personal and professional relationships the data collection was ongoing outside of the interviews.

The participant selection was limited to C&A female educational leaders in and around CADOE. While I have personal and professional relationships with all the participants, I used a form of snowball sampling (Noy, 2017). As is culturally appropriate, I started with two elders

that I knew who had a deep knowledge of Cheyenne and Arapaho educational histories and asked for their thoughts on others I should include. After reaching out to these two, they recommended the other four participants. Once they were identified, the recruitment process involved asking each leader to take part in the study by email or by phone call. The interviews were recorded by audio via my phone, transcribed, and coded. I also kept a journal to keep track of notes and hunches. Additionally, various artifacts related to the CADOE operations were collected along with interviews, which included Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) documents, Tribal Resolutions, event flyers, meeting minutes, etc. These items were analyzed together with the interviews.

Once the collection of data occurred, data analysis began immediately. Data analysis required creating a process that allowed deep insight into how I integrated the conceptual frameworks, literature, and the research purpose and questions (Bhattacharya, 2017). Inductive analysis was used, which is described by Bhattacharya (2017) as working up from the data. This allowed me to code, categorize, and find emerging themes that provided organizational structure to visualize the data. Multiple rounds of in vivo coding were used. This is an open coding technique that focuses on direct quotes from participants (Saldana, 2016).

Limits and Possibilities – Insider and Outsider Positionality

All the participants are C&A tribal citizens but are not necessarily from the same community or family, as each C&A female educational leader is unique and not every experience is the same. The differences between their experiences were dependent on the year they worked in and around the department, funding, support from the tribal organization, and how long each leader served in and around the department of education. Furthermore, the way each participant

defined or described building capacity or asserting sovereignty depended on the way they grew up, higher educational levels obtained, levels of cultural knowledge and elder status, and other varied experiences. There is no absolute truth to a story or experience, but the intent was to make meaning of the lived experiences of C&A female educational leaders.

I also understand how privileged I am as a researcher, administrator, and community member of the C&A Tribes, operating in an insider role. Due to my status as an insider in the community, the interview process was not a “formal” process but was prioritized as just a “visit.” When C&A people are at ease, they are more likely to share stories and jokes and be more vulnerable. I am familiar with the families, communities, and history and did not need further explanation of many things that were discussed; this allowed me to dive deeper into the stories and establish a level of comfort with each participant. Linda T. Smith (1999) asserts, “Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the research belongs to the community” (p. 139). Furthermore, being a community member comes with a different set of roles, relationships, status and position (Smith, 1999) compared to an outsider.

To the academic community I am considered an insider because of the proximity between myself and my research. However, I am also just a community member who wants to contribute to the good of my people. I remain reflexive and critical of my subjectivities through ongoing journaling. As a person representing the Western academy this also positions me as an outsider to some of my participants. I had to mind this boundary, as will be evident in some of my findings.

I am also aware that my status as an Executive Director of CADOE may have created some unique social and power dynamics when working with participants. This may have

influenced data collection and presented a limitation for the study. However, the individuals I worked with are former leaders, and not under my purview as employees under my leadership. Rather, they are elders, mentors, and peers with historical knowledge of the department.

Subjectivity Statement

My positionality as a researcher comes from a perspective of a Cheyenne and Arapaho woman, specifically being raised by a grandfather who was an Arapaho Chief and instilled the Arapaho way of life in me at a young age. I am a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes but am also a descendent of the Kiowa and Muscogee Creek Tribes of Oklahoma. I have lived in El Reno, one of 13 C&A tribal communities, all my life. Additionally, I am a partner, mother, daughter, auntie, sister, granddaughter, niece, and cousin in my family and community. There is an assumption that all 574+ tribes are a monolith; however, every Tribal Nation in the United States, including the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, who are recognized as one nation but are two distinct peoples, has their own language, culture, stories, and way of life.

Many Indigenous people and Tribal Nations suffer from federal Indian policy that has been detrimental to our identities, communities, progress, and overall well-being. Although Indigenous people have similar perspectives and experiences, we cannot assume we are all the same. The purpose of my research is to share stories, experiences, and perspectives of Cheyenne and Arapaho female educational leaders who are from our tribal communities. I approached my research design, data collection, and data analysis through a community-based lens.

I attended Haskell Indian Nations University as an undergraduate student where I received an A.A. degree in Liberal Arts and a B.A. in American Indian Studies. When I decided to attend Haskell, I was initially discouraged from going by family and community members

because it was a “party school” and “they don’t take academics seriously” there. However, I would not be the person or leader I am today without my undergraduate experience at Haskell. Going from a public school system that did not value the uniqueness of Indigenous students, to a tribal college system that affirmed my identity everyday had a long-lasting impact on me as a student, tribal citizen, and leader. We were allowed to be proud of who we were and where we came from. At the time I thought a bachelor’s degree was as far as I was going to go with my education, but one of my professors, Dr. Denise Low Weso, said to me right before I graduated, “You should think about graduate school.”

My mother (who was a participant in this study) was the only family member to attend college and receive an A.A. degree. Although she completed credits towards a bachelor’s degree she did not finish. I am the first person on my mother and father’s side of the family to receive a graduate degree. I chose to attend the University of Oklahoma to obtain a master’s in education degree in Adult and Higher Education with an emphasis in Intercollegiate Athletics Administration. During that time, I became interested in women’s leadership and feminism. My advisor, Dr. Vicki Williams, spoke with me about my desire to become an athletic director. She told me that women are often not successful in the field because it is dominated by white men. She said being a woman of color is like a double negative; you’re a woman and Indigenous. It was the first time I was introduced to intersectionality, or as Cho et al. (2013) describe, the “nature of the race/gender/class/sexuality/nation” (p. 787). It was the first time I thought critically about my race, gender, class, and Tribal Nation and how it would impact my desire to be a leader.

Lastly, I have been employed with the C&A Tribes for the past 19 years in a leadership/management capacity. For the past 10 years I have served as the Executive Director for CADOE. After graduating from Haskell, I knew I wanted to work with my people to make a positive impact for my family, community, and people. While it is challenging, the progress we have made over the years is worth it. My grandpa always said, “You have to be good to people.” That lesson and teaching is the reason why I am in a leadership position today. The relationships you build with students, families, community members, colleagues, and tribal leaders is one of the most important things you can do as a leader.

Summary

This Indigenous storywork study provides a connection between Dr. Mann’s work and my research, extending the educational history of the C&A people. The study provides a perspective from C&A female educational leaders who have built capacity and asserted sovereignty throughout the years. TEDs and TEAs play an important role in creating educational systems that benefit their students, families, and communities. In the past, tribes could only rely on funding from the BIA to provide services to their tribal members. Now tribes are generating revenue by creating and supplementing tribal programs. The C&A people believe in helping, meaning we want our services in the hands of our people.

Tribal Nations have always prioritized asserting tribal sovereignty. Within the past 20 years the research being done by Indigenous scholars has added sovereignty to the Indigenous education landscape. Historically, federal Indian policy has created systems of education that were counterproductive for Indigenous people. We were forbidden to dress in our tribal regalia, our hair was cut, and we were stripped of our names and Indigenous languages. Now we can not

only reverse these policies but create our own policies and educational systems with C&A values, culture, and way of life at the forefront.

My hope is that the stories provided in this study show how our TED has impacted my life as a student and as a leader. The investment in education not only benefits our students, but our nation as well. Due to the leadership of our education department, we are now positioned to regain control and assert our sovereignty in the education of our tribal citizens. This research allows us to continue to grow and develop educational systems for our students, families, and communities.

Glossary of Key Definitions

American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN): The term used by the federal government, policy and research to refer specifically to Indigenous peoples in the United States (NIEA, n.d.).

Asserting Sovereignty: The ability to liberate the potential of sovereignty is inherently connected to a nation's ability to enhance educator skill sets across the educator ecosystem to create CSRP (Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogies) learning environments for their citizens (RedCorn, 2020).

Building Capacity: The ability of a Native nation to administer and/or influence the education of their citizens (RedCorn, 2020).

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA): Provides services directly or through contracts, grants, or compacts to 574 federally recognized tribes (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2024).

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE): The BIE implements federal Indian education programs for roughly 46,000 students at 183 schools across the U.S (U.S. Department of Interior, 2024).

Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes (C&A Tribes): C&A Tribes, a federally recognized tribe located in Concho, Oklahoma (CEDS Review Committee, 2023).

Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education (CADOE): Tribal education department of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes (Whitlow, 2024).

Indian Education: Indian Education is derived from the Indian Education Act of 1972 (IEA). IEA authorized new supplemental education programs for American Indian students, including a formula grant program. McCoy (2024) states, “Under the act, the Department of Education had to account for Native students’ needs and create space for Native parents to influence the education their students receives” (p. 65).

Indigenous Woman: Indigenous is also used interchangeably with American Indian, Native American, and Indian. Gunn (1986) states, “An American Indian woman is primarily defined by her tribal identity. In her eyes, her destiny is necessarily that of her people, and her sense of herself as a woman is first and foremost prescribed by her tribe” (p. 43). While acknowledging the nuanced differences between gendered terms such as “female” and “woman” as it relates to biology vs. social gender constructs, the participants in this study identify with these terms without distinguishing these differences. Therefore, these terms are used interchangeably throughout because they identify as female as assigned at birth and simultaneously socially identify as women in their everyday lives.

Local Education Agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function, for public elementary schools or secondary schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

Office of Indian Education (OIE): Administers the Indian Education Program of ESEA, as amended by ESSA (Title VI, Part A), which establishes policies and provides financial and technical assistance for supporting LEAs, Indian Tribes, and organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

Sovereignty: The authority to self-govern (NCAI, 2020).

State Education Agency (SEA): The state board of education or other agency or officer primarily responsible for state supervision of public elementary schools and secondary schools, or, if there is no such officer or agency, an officer or agency designated by the Governor or by state law (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

Tribal Education Agency (TEA): Often used interchangeably with tribal education departments (TEDs). TEDs/TEAs work to strengthen the legal rights of tribes to control the formal education of tribal members (NARF, 2011).

Tribal Education Department (TED): Created by a sovereign tribal government whose primary role is to support the education of its tribal citizens (Bowers, 2010).

Tribal Educations Department National Assembly (TEDNA): A Native-run nonprofit organization that seeks to provide technical assistance to Tribal Education Departments that are looking to craft more comprehensive educational systems (Tribal Education Departments National Assembly, 2024).

Tribal Sovereignty: The essence of tribal sovereignty is the ability to govern and to protect and enhance the health, safety, and welfare of tribal citizens within tribal territory (NCAI, 2020).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is an overview and synthesis of relevant literature related to CADOE. I begin with a broad overview of the history of Indian education. Then, since this research is so intimately tied to Mann's (1997) work as a C&A scholar, and the case parameters of my study begins in 1983 where her work ended, I offer a chapter-by-chapter summary of her book. Additionally, there are many terms, names, and toponyms that are tied to C&A histories that show up in the findings, allowing the reader to have a deeper interpretation of this work and place-based histories. In this work, Mann explains how Cheyennes and Arapahoes are separate and distinct people who became allies, ultimately sharing land, government, and education. This is followed by a summary of literature on Indigenous sovereignty, TEDs and TEAs. I conclude with an overview of the conceptual frameworks informing this research.

History of Indian Education: A Broad View

Education is not just the transfer of knowledge; education is power (Brayboy, 2014). Indian Education on the other hand is incredibly complex and layered and involves the federal, state, and tribal governments. There is not another race/ethnicity that is as unique as Indigenous people and their educational systems. Indigenous peoples "have inherent rights and a political relationship with the U.S. government that does not derive from race or ethnicity" (NCAI, 2020, p. 18). This means Tribal Nations have the right to govern themselves and the U.S. government has a government-to-government relationship with said nations. Tribal Nations are the only group of people in the U.S. to be subject to the following federal policy: removal/reservation/treaty period, allotment/assimilation period, Indian reorganization period,

termination period, self-determination period, and nation-to-nation period (NCAI, 2020) throughout their existence.

Tribal nations are sovereign nations. Sovereignty is the authority to self-govern. From 1778-1871 the U.S. government signed 370 treaties with Tribal Nations. In these treaties the U.S. government promised to provide healthcare, food, and most importantly education in exchange for Indigenous peoples' lands. How the U.S. government interpreted the promise of education is a result of the federal Indian policy towards Tribal Nations (NCAI, 2020).

Indigenous people had their own educational systems in place long before European contact. Furthermore, "Indigenous peoples have always shared the educational experiences of their children" (RedCorn, 2019, p. 214). As stated previously, education is about power and control, and ultimately, who has control over Indian education. Brayboy (2014) shares:

Education in its many forms is imbued with power: power to control young peoples' bodies, epistemic engagement, curriculum and teacher; power to best determine how education and schooling are utilized and to what end; power to control what kinds of knowledge is shared—or not—when, and where. (p. 396)

Lastly, Indigenous scholar K. Tsianina Lomawaima states (as cited in Brayboy, 2014), "The history of American Indian Education [can] be boiled down to three simple words: Battle for power" (p. 396). The responsibility for Indian education has always been the U.S. government's; however, local education agencies (LEAs), state education agencies (SEAs) and tribal education agencies (TEAs)/tribal education department (TEDs) now share this responsibility.

Due to the federal government's policies for American Indian/Alaska Native our students and families have suffered for generations. Since 1968, the federal government's policies toward

AI/AN students have been aimed at self-determination. Self-determination and self-governance mean that tribes have control over their destinies (NCAI, 2020).

A Summary of Cheyenne-Arapaho Education: 1871-1982

In this section I offer a chapter-by-chapter overview of Dr. Mann's (1997) book, *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education: 1871-1982*. As described in the introduction to this chapter, this research starts in 1983 when Mann's book ends. There are many names, concepts, toponyms, and terms that show up in the findings of this dissertation that allow the reader to have a deeper understanding of the place-based contexts surrounding CADOE. Additionally, I offer an overview of my recent scholarship that articulates CADOE work over the course of my tenure as Executive Director since 2015.

Cheyenne and Arapaho Education, A Retrospection

Mann (1997) provides an educational history of the C&A Tribes in her book *Cheyenne and Arapaho Education: 1871-1982*. Her research is one of the most important texts and recorded history for students and families interested in learning more about Cheyenne and Arapaho education. In Chapter 1, Mann makes it clear that the C&A people were once two separate tribes. Mann begins with an explanation of each tribe's origin that includes oral history. While there are similarities between the tribes, they are two distinct people.

The Cheyenne people lived in northeast Canada and eventually moved south through the marshlands between Ontario and Minnesota. The Cheyenne was also referred to as The People and they once built a village near Fort Yates, North Dakota and established a home on the Grant River, which is a tributary of the Missouri River. Once the Cheyenne arrived at the Black Hills,

the Arapahoes were already occupying the territory. The Arapahoes did not view the Cheyenne as intruders and accepted them as friends, and this resulted in a confederation of the two tribes.

According to the oral history of the Arapahoes, the Creator created the Arapahoe people first and placed them in the center of the earth. The Arapahoe also lived in Canada and eventually ended up in the norther plains. During the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark visited some Cheyenne camps but did not contact the Arapahoes. Both tribes were allies and lived in the Black Hills until 1816, when they sent hunting expeditions into Wyoming and Colorado.

For the Cheyennes the teachings of Erect Horn and Sweet Medicine and their creation story, preserved in their ceremonies, developed into their worldview. The number four is significant and has symbolism in the direction, age of man, color, warrior societies, representative, and horse color. Most significantly, Mann (1997) describes how Cheyenne history is divided into four periods: the ancient time, the time of the ‘dogs’, the time of the buffalo, and the time of the horse.

She further explains how, much like the Cheyennes, the number four had a prominent role in the Arapaho worldview. For example, “The Arapahoe had four lineages, four corners of the universe, four ancestral beings, four stages of life (childhood, youth, maturity, old age), space[d] their children four years apart, held their lodge meetings for a duration of four days, etc.” (Mann, 1997, p. 6). The Arapaho people are very spiritual and view the Sun Dance (Offerings Lodge) as their most important ceremony. They were taught to be respectful, patient, and kind, and to develop endurance.

On July 6, 1825, the Treaty of Friendship was signed and the Cheyennes acknowledge the sovereign status of the white man's government. It was not until 1830-1832 when the Arapahoes signed their first treaty, which was unofficial and was negotiated by Captain John Gantt. The purpose of these treaties was to regulate trade. In the 1830s, the Pawnee captured the four sacred arrows. This threatened the existence of the Cheyennes. The Cheyenne negotiated unsuccessfully for the return of the arrows for over a quarter century. The dates are not known, but eventually the Cheyennes recovered two of the arrows.

Between 1825 and 1865 the United States negotiated four treaties with the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes, which meant acquiring title to their vast land holdings. With every treaty signed, tribal land base slowly eroded into a fraction of the land they once had since time immemorial. As a result of the Medicine Lodge Treaty that was signed on October 18, 1867, the Southern Arapahoes and Southern Cheyennes were assigned to a vaguely defined reservation in Indian Territory. The U.S. government agreed to appropriate funds for the employment of agency personnel, resident agent, farmer, physician, carpenter, miller, and engineer. The most important treaty provision was in article 7, related to education:

In order to ensure the civilization of the tribes entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted, especially by such of them as are or may be settled on said agricultural reservation, and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school; and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians that this stipulation is strictly complied with; and the United States agrees that for every thirty children between said ages, who can be induced or compelled to attend school, a house shall be provided, and a

teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education shall be furnished, who will reside among said Indians, and faithfully discharge his or her duties as a teacher. The provisions of this article to continue for not less than twenty years.

(Treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, 1867)

This treaty provision began the process of forced assimilation under the guise of Eurocentric civilization through education for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. During this time, education became more formal, at least in a Eurocentric context.

For the Cheyennes education meant learning their languages, ceremonies, value system, moral code, kinship system, tribal government, band structure, gender roles, traditions, customs, and economy. In other words, the Cheyenne people already had an educational system that was holistic and well developed. The Cheyenne people believe that “education was not separate from life, but intertwined with it” (Mann, 1997, p. 15). Mann (1997) explains how “Each was educated to be a good Arapaho or a good Cheyenne—and they stood in stark contrast to the white American schooled in the formal education system” (p. 15-16). Lastly, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes always had their own educational systems that was reflective of their way of life, and it had always been their responsibility prior to European contact.

Early Days in the White Man’s “Civilizing” Web of Education, 1871-1880

First and foremost, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes agreed to formal education in 1867 as requisite to peace. Mann (1997) asserts how “formal education, which differed from tribal-specific learning styles, was an alien concept to Cheyennes and Arapahoes” (p. 19). What they did not anticipate was the assimilationist goal of education.

According to the United States Constitution, jurisdiction over Indian affairs is vested with the federal government. Due to this stipulation the Secretary of War was charged with regulating Indian Trade. Within the War Department, the Office (Bureau) of Indian Affairs was created on March 22, 1824, and in 1849 the responsibility for Indian Affairs was transferred to the Department of Interior.

Manifest Destiny is the belief that the United States was destined to expand west across North America. This belief was used to justify the forced removal of Native Americans from their homes. The white Anglo-Saxon Protestant view of themselves as saints was consistent with the doctrine of Manifest Destiny (Mann, 1997). This view affected the way they administered Indian education. As Mann (1997) shares:

From the earliest days of American History . . . Indian education and Indian conversion to Christianity were either synonymous, or the former was considered a direct means to the latter, and both were left to the same agency, --the missionary, to whose support, in so far as he was a teacher, the United States for years contributed. (p. 20)

As Europeans, American colonists, and explorers became more aware and settled into this continent, the education of American Indians became one of the biggest issues.

The United States began making treaties with Indians in 1778. This formally established the federal-Indian relationship. Nearly 800 treaties were negotiated. According to the Office of Indian Affairs, 120 treaties contained provisions for education. These provisions served as the basis of the federal responsibility for Indian education. In 1819, Congress appropriated \$10,000 for the civilization fund. The purpose of this fund was to teach Indians agriculture, reading,

writing, and arithmetic. The white formal education system was an anomaly to the American Indians (Mann, 1997).

Cheyennes and the Arapahoes refused to occupy the reservation stipulated in the Medicine Lodge Treaty because of the unpleasant water that even their horses refused to drink. On August 10, 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant signed an executive order that created a new Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation that is now western Oklahoma. Both tribes settled into their new reservation life. The Keeper of the Sacred Arrows provided an observation about the first few days:

Long time ago, when we came to the reservation, the White Man told us that we had to have schools, and that we had to send our children there. At first we refused because we were treated like prisoners, and we did not want our children to learn the White Man's ways. We had our own ways and we liked them better. It still was our country and we did not want anyone to tell us what to do. Time went by . . . We became a small island . . . in a rising ocean of White Men. (Mann, 1997, pp. 23-24).

Although the federal government has impacted every facet of life for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, it is evident they have always had their own ways of life, languages, cultures, belief system, and educational system.

In January 1871, the formal Eurocentric education process began with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes when a day school opened. This school began with 17 Arapahoe students and eight Cheyenne students. The schoolhouse was sparsely furnished, unpainted, and had a dirt floor. Chief Little Raven, who also signed the Medicine Lodge Treaty, encouraged the young to go to school. He wanted them to learn to write and do arithmetic. Because of his attitude toward the

new school system, the Arapahoes were more receptive to education and reservation life (Mann, 1997).

The Cheyennes, however, were warned by their prophet, Sweet Medicine, that the white-skinned people would use education as a means of genocide. Mann explains, “they will ask for your children to teach them their way of living, to rub out all our past deeds, our beliefs, our way of speaking” (Mann, 1997, p. 28). Because of this deep-rooted belief, the Cheyennes refused to allow their children to be educated by the white man (Mann, 1997). What was being taught in school by the white man was in direct opposition of what Cheyennes believed to be useful. For example, Cheyenne children do not need school to learn how to hunt buffalo.

The Cheyenne did surrender on March 6, 1875, because their community became poverty stricken. There were no ponies, wood, or water, and they had very little to eat. It was during this time that the Cheyennes realized the power of the government. The Cheyennes consented for the first time to place their children in school. According to Mann (1997), the purpose of this education was to civilize Indian students. Not only did the school provide instruction in practical industrial training, but the goal of the school was to Christianize the students.

Agent Miles requested two additional school buildings on December 9, 1878. This allowed them to educate 475 Cheyenne and Arapaho students. Once he secured the funding for the buildings, a boarding school facility was built north of the agency. The two new schools were used to educate each tribe separately, so their unique identities were maintained. The location of the schools was north of the agency at Caddo Springs, which is now Concho, Oklahoma. According to Mann (1997), “despite the entanglement in the white man’s ‘civilizing’ web of education, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes maintained their unique identities as people” (p. 35).

Off Reservation Schools: Assimilation or “The Blanket”

Between 1828 and 1887, the federal policy towards Indians was the removal, reservation, and treaty period, as the U.S. government pressured eastern tribes to move west, seeking more tribal land. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes were unhappy with the lands set aside in the Treaty of Medicine Lodge. This led to a new reservation created by an executive order from President Grant. In 1870, the Arapahoes relocated to the agency near the North Canadian River Valley, which is present day El Reno, Oklahoma. Chief Little Raven encouraged Arapahoes to send their children to school. At the federal level, the Office of Indian Affairs organized a Division of Medicine and Education, which later became the Division of Civilization and Education. After a year of existence, it was renamed to the Division of Education and was placed under the Superintendent of Indian Schools (Mann, 1997).

The U.S. government and its soldiers were unrelenting as they sought to extinguish Indians' title to their lands. During 1874-1875, a series of intense military campaigns began and are referred to as the Red River War. The government incarcerated Indian activists and held them as prisoners of war. This is a significant moment in Cheyenne and Arapaho history. The Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Caddos, Kiowas, and Comanches were targets for imprisonment at Fort Marion. Seventy-two Indians were held in an old Spanish fortress in St. Augustine, Florida for an unspecified amount of time. The prisoners were then moved to Fort Sill and First Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt became the jailor (Mann, 1997).

Lieutenant Pratt implemented a military regiment with the Indian prisoners. The men wore army uniforms, learn to drill, and become soldiers. Former teachers provided classes to the prisoners who focused on promoting English speech. The prisoners adapted to Pratt's routine and

ideology. Out of the 72 prisoners only 50 returned to Indian Territory. The remaining prisoners chose to receive an education in the white man's ways. This was determined as a success by Pratt. He believed that Indians were just as competent as the white man if they were provided with equal opportunity (Mann, 1997).

During this time, the government moved from making treaties with tribes and assuming financial responsibility for educating them (Mann, 1997). What also became a priority was the indoctrinating Indians into the white value system. Because of Pratt's success with the prisoners, a policy shift happened. From 1887-1934, the policy towards Indians was allotment and assimilation. This meant pushing Indians into mainstream American life through the General Allotment Act (also known as the Dawes Act) of 1887. The Dawes Act forced more than 90 million acres of reservation land to be taken from Tribal Nations and given to settlers (NCAI, 2020). Assimilation meant divesting from Indianness and transforming Indians into Anglo-Europeans. The only choice for Indians was to become English-speaking, literate, educated persons.

The Fort Marion prisoners chose to continue with formal education in the east. Nine Cheyennes and Arapahoes were among the former prisoners who arrived at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute for Negroes. Samuel C. Armstrong established Hampton in 1867 under the sponsorship of the American Missionary Society. The prisoners were initiated into Armstrong's philosophy of education, which was to speak English and learn to work (Mann, 1997). The Commissioner of Indian Affairs soon came to believe that Indian children were as bright and teachable as white children. Hampton Institute was deemed a success.

Due to the limited educational facilities on the reservation, there was an emphasis for C&A students to attend off-reservation boarding schools. Pratt requested to establish a separate industrial school for Indian students. His request was to use abandoned military barracks as Indian schools (Mann, 1997). As a result of his recruitment efforts, Carlisle Indian Industrial School opened its doors on November 1, 1879. Carlisle is recognized as the first off-reservation Indian School. By 1880, it was reported that 42 Cheyenne and 21 Arapahoe children were in school at Carlisle. The families of the children who attended Carlisle were told not to expect to hear from them. Some of the students were placed in the homes of farmers in the region. Part of Carlisle's mission was to transform Indian students into white farmers and domestics. Pratt was not truthful about his intent with Indian students. He wanted to remove any part of Indianness from them.

From 1882-1899, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes sent a total of 943 students to Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Carlisle operated for four decades and officially closed its doors on September 1, 1918. When Carlisle closed, Indian students were allowed to transfer to schools closer to their homes. Pratt accomplished a two-prong system while at Carlisle, industrial training and the outing system. During this time the following training schools opened: Genoa, Haskell Institute, and Chilocco (Haworth Institute). They were followed by Grand Junction Training School, Carson, Stewart Institute, Santa Fe (Institute of American Indian Arts), Pierre, and Fort Totten (Mann, 1997). Families were more comfortable sending their students to off-reservation schools that were closer to home.

“The People” and Missionaries’ Schools

Indian people were often thought of as savages, heathens, and pagans. White people took it upon themselves to worry about the spiritual welfare of Indians and believed education was a means of Christianity and civilization. However, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes were far from savages and heathens. Mann (1997) shares:

“The People” were intensely spiritual, believing in an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, beneficent Being whose spirit was present in everything in the universe. They walked in balance with all creation, in which the natural world and human beings were interrelated and interdependent. Each tribe and individual observed ceremonial ritual prayers to maintain harmony with “The Man Above” and “The Great One.” Furthermore, the sacred and secular were interwoven in a holistic way of life in which everyone and all things were accorded respect. (p. 69)

The religion of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes has always existed, but because they were not Christians their spirituality was not considered valid. During this time the Mennonites requested permission to enter the reservation and establish a mission. Permission was granted on May 11, 1880. Minister S.S. Haury utilized a large multipurpose building to open the mission in August 1881. The mission accommodated twenty-five students at the Mennonite Mission at Darlington (Mann, 1997). The goal of the school was to teach biblical and Christian knowledge as well as Christian principles (Mann, 1997).

In addition to the mission school at Darlington, the Mennonite mission acquired Cantonment, a former military fort. Fort Cantonment closed its doors on October 2, 1882, and on December 1, 1882, most of the buildings were transferred to the Mennonites. The missionaries

included an adult education class that was offered three times a week. Students were placed in “good” Christian families in Kansas, where they earned between \$5-\$13 a month (Mann, 1997).

By 1884, attendance at Darlington was 36 and Cantonment had 18 students. Darlington was established solely for Arapaho students. In addition to the Darlington and Cantonment locations, the Mennonites added two more locations. In 1889, the Indian Industrial Contract School in Halstead and the Mennonite Mission in Seger Colony opened due to the steady enrollment at Darlington and Cantonment. Although the Mennonite mission attempted to Christianize the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, their efforts were not completely successful. The purpose of Cantonment was to work with both tribes; however, the Cheyennes refused to send their children to school. This presented a challenge to the Mennonites because they wanted to break up the tribal connections of the people (Mann, 1997). As Mann writes, “Cheyenne and Arapaho traditional spiritual ways are deeply rooted in the sacred earth and will endure, though other religions and philosophies appear and disappear. They already have withstood the test of time” (p. 84). And they still do.

Schools on the Cheyenne and Arapaho Island

In Chapter 5, Mann (1997) summarizes the first four chapters of her book. During the time period described in these chapters, both tribes were living reservation life. The Arapahoes were supportive of education and were referred to as “progressive”, while the Cheyennes who did not immediately embrace education were called “backward.” Around 1876, buffalo were practically extinct. This had an impact on both tribes’ ways of life. Buffalo was a resource for food, supplies, and equipment that was used in everyday life.

As a result of federal policy and treaty obligations the Cheyennes and Arapahoes had the following schools operating on their reservation: Arapaho Manual Labor and Boarding School, Cheyenne Manual Labor and Boarding School, Red Moon School, Seger Industrial School, Cantonment Boarding School, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho School (Concho School). Each was located throughout the reservation and reflective of the tribe that lived in that location. Even today, depending on where the tribal community is located, either Cheyenne or Arapaho families live there. For example, Clinton has a high population of Cheyennes living in that community and Canton has a high population of Arapaho families living there.

The Arapaho Manual Labor and Boarding school was established in 1871 and opened its doors in September 1872. The curriculum focused on a standard created for Indians, which focused on English education, industrial training, and religion. School began with high attendance, but it slowly decreased. The Arapaho Chiefs had to step in and state that the schools needed to be filled up. This resulted in high attendance for a year. The school was mainly built for Arapahoes, but Cheyennes were accepted as well. Over time, Superintendent Charles E. Shell recommended consolidating the C&A School, Cantonment, and the Seger school to help with salaries. In 1908, the three schools were consolidated (Mann, 1997).

In August 1879, the Cheyenne Manual Labor and Boarding school buildings were completed and the school opened. By 1880 124 students were enrolled. The school focused on manual labor for boys, such as, cutting wood, cutting hair, tailoring, milking, kitchen work, dining room work, and cleaning school rooms, in addition to English education and religious instruction. Girls were taught to sew, wash, mend clothes, chamber work, kitchen work, and

dining room work. Girls were also taught English education and religion. Religious education consisted of evening devotionals and Sunday school (Mann, 1997).

The federal policy during this time was still allotment and assimilation. Indians had to be assimilated by any means necessary. This was accomplished through education, civilization, and allotment. The goal was for everyone to become like white men. With the passing of the Dawes Act, the reservation was opened to white settlers on April 19, 1892. The “surplus” lands were sold for \$1.5 million and were opened to homesteading. Around 30,000 white people who were also referred to as “Boomers” claimed their land by rushing onto the reservation. While education had been promised to Indian students, the federal government had not fulfilled its treaty promise. The government was obligated to provide a teacher and facilities for every 30 Cheyenne and Arapaho students. After 24 years of educational involvement on the reservation, attendance was still an issue. By 1908, the C&A schools consolidated into one school at the Cheyenne Manual Labor and Boarding School site near Caddo Springs. This school became the Cheyenne and Arapaho School (Mann, 1997).

The Red Moon School was located 100 miles west of Darlington Agency in the northwest corner of the reservation, which is present day Hammon, Oklahoma. The school had an enrollment of 32 students by 1898 and focused on providing English language and practical skills. The students were required to focus on the industrial skillset that was included in all reservation schools at the time. Girls were expected to learn how to sew and knit while the boys learned to fence and plant trees. Red Moon School never established a strong record of attendance, which resulted in a decline of financial support. The government’s role in education was “to educate the Indian in the ways of civilized life” (Mann, 1997, p. 96). Once again, the

federal policy was not concerned with preserving the culture or traditions of American Indian students. Red Moon closed in 1910, and the students transferred to Seger Colony School (Mann, 1997).

The Seger Indian Industrial School was located sixty miles from Darlington Agency, west of Cobb Creek, which is present-day Weatherford, Oklahoma. The school was created for mostly Arapahoe students and opened on January 11, 1893. Seger offered an academic and industrial education. Boys learned farm work and to care for stock and girls were responsible for kitchen, dining room, and laundry work. Christianity was central to the curriculum. Instead of the Ghost Dance, they attended Sunday school. Seger was influential in educating children to make them functional in white society. The People liked him so much he was given an Arapaho name. After serving as superintendent for 13 years, he left the position in 1905. By 1932, the boarding school closed and was a day school up until 1936. No long after, that the Seger Indian Industrial School ceased to exist on the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation (Mann, 1997).

The Cantonment Boarding School was located 70 miles from the Darlington Agency, north central of the reservation, which is present-day in Canton, Oklahoma. The school building was completed in 1898 and was big enough to educate 120-125 students. The educational goals remained the same for this school as well, “abolishment of the anomalous Indian reservation system” (Mann, 1997, p. 100). When the doors opened only 15 students attended, but enrollment quickly rose to 101 students. While the federal policy shifted to sending Indian students to off-reservation boarding schools that would continue to focus on civilization, reservation boarding schools increased attendance. What was unique about the Cantonment Boarding school is that the curriculum was innovative, by including Indian needs. Students learned mathematics that was

unique to them, such as learning how to weigh stock, purchase cloth by the yard, marketing grain, and determining the average yield of corn per acre. This was considered a community-oriented course, which is now known as place-based education. Boys continued to be taught industrial education while girls were trained in home economics. Despite their success and progress, doors closed on June 30, 1927 (Mann, 1997).

By 1927, the goal of education continued to be the same. Education was used as a means of “eradicating Indianness, a way of civilizing Indians, and, as viewed by humanitarians, a way of saving them from extinction” (Mann, 1997, p. 103). On May 29, 1908, the Arapaho and Cheyenne schools were consolidated into one, the Cheyenne and Arapaho School. The combined school was located near Caddo Springs, which is now present-day El Reno, Oklahoma. The Cheyenne and Arapaho school used the same approach, which prioritized civilization, religion, and education. Education placed an emphasis on farming and homemaking (Mann, 1997).

In 1912, enrollment was 139 students and the highest grade offered was fifth grade. During this time public schools were increasing and this affected enrollment of the Cheyenne and Arapaho School. Because of the decrease in enrollment, students from other tribes were allowed to attend. Besides the Cheyenne and Arapaho, the following tribes attended: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Sioux, Shawnee, Seneca, and Creek. While the demographic of the school was changing the name changed to Concho School (Mann, 1997).

Concho School was considered an off-reservation boarding school because other tribes were allowed to attend. Concho offered grades one through twelve, but by 1952 the school dropped grades nine through twelve. Students were then bused into the local school district for high school. Concho was still focused on offering Christianity because the curriculum,

philosophy, and goals of Indian education did not change much. Although Indian boarding schools had different names and were in different locations, the curriculum and goal of education was the same, civilization (Mann, 1997)

Legislated into Public Schools

The public-school education period spread on the C&A reservation because of the Dawes Act. As a result of this act, white people surrounded the land holdings of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Public school education was used as a form of assimilation centering western ideology. Public school education was considered a better option because Indian students were required to attend school with white children, which would accelerate civilization efforts. During this period, Superintendent W. N. Hailmann recommended transferring the control of Indian education from the federal government to the states (Mann, 1997).

It was assumed that Indian children would receive the same treatment and privileges as white students in public schools. Schools gladly accepted the tuition paid by the government, but the conditions for equal treatment were not upheld. Indian students were educated in separate classrooms and sometimes in separate buildings from their white peers. White students did not like sharing space with Indian students because they thought they were dirty, had diseases, and had no morals. Overall, public schools were no different in their attempts to change Indian children into dark-skinned white people (Mann, 1997).

The Meriam Report and Its Impact on Cheyenne-Arapaho Education

In 1926, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior wanted an objective investigation conducted regarding the conditions of Indian country and the effects of federal Indian policy (NIEA, n.d.). Dr. Lewis Meriam was assigned as technical director for the study. On February 21, 1928, the

monumental report entitled *The Problem of Indian Administration*, also known as the *Meriam Report*, was completed. The *Meriam Report* outlines the conditions of housing, healthcare, and schooling and how the federal government's policies failed Native Americans (NIEA, n.d.). The report documented the federal government did not properly carry out its trust responsibility to American Indian people (Mann, 1997).

John Collier was the Commissioner of Indian affairs from 1933-1945. He was an advocate for Indian rights. He described federal policy as detrimental to Indians economically, spiritually, and socially. Mann (1997) writes:

On the economic side, the historic policy systematically destroyed Indian estate and thereby the possibilities of Indian self-support, first by treaty violation and later by the legalized capture of Indian lands through the allotment system.

Culturally, it sought to wipe out Indian ways of life and Indian modes of thought, utterly regardless of their significant, beauty, or adaptation to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the Indians.

On the civic side, it sought to destroy Indian social and political customs and institutions, replacing them...with a rigid and unyielding bureaucratic despotism in which the Indians themselves were expected to play none but a submissive role, and against which they had no legal protection or appeal. (p. 121)

Collier was critical of the government's policies toward Indians and saw the devastation the policies caused to Indian communities.

Due to the work of John Collier and Dr. Lewis Meriam a new policy was created. On June 18, 1932, the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) was codified and had three objectives:

economic rehabilitation, organization of Indian tribes managing their own affairs, and civic and cultural freedom. The IRA excluded Alaska and Oklahoma, but congressional legislation was passed for the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act in 1936, which promoted the general welfare of the Indians of the state of Oklahoma. Shortly after, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma adopted a constitution and bylaws that were ratified on September 18, 1937. This meant the tribes would operate under a white form of government (Mann, 1997).

Shortly after the passage of the IRA, the Johnson O'Malley Act followed and was adopted by Congress on April 16, 1934. This act authorized the Secretary of the Interior to work with states regarding Indian education. The policy of the federal government was no longer allotment and assimilation. The period between 1934 and 1945 is known as the Indian reorganization period, which sought to restore tribal lands and help Tribal Nations reform their tribal governments (Mann, 1997).

Public schools were required to use the tuition payments for Indian students for enrichment programs, including addressing language or social deficiencies of Indian children, extending school programs and community activities, or purchasing instructional supplies. The monies obligated to Indian students were supposed to be deposited into a separate account from the general fund. This money was to be used solely for Indian children's educational experience. As a result, Cheyenne and Arapaho students began attending schools in El Reno, Clinton, Hammon, and Geary (Mann, 1997).

“The People” Speak and Act on Education

The signing of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867 stipulated that Indian children between the ages of six and 16 were to be placed in school to receive an education focused on

English. While western education prioritized the civilization and assimilation process, the Cheyennes' and Arapahoes' goal for education was to make them functional in a white society while maintaining their Cheyenne and Arapaho identity. When formal education was introduced, the most significant barrier was language. Indian students were exposed to reading, writing, and arithmetic and later history was added (Mann, 1997).

The schooling process remained the same; half a day was spent learning curriculum and the other half day focused on manual labor. Cheyenne and Arapaho students were forced to learn the English language. The Cheyennes were adamant about not losing their language and culture. Both languages have survived and to this day the Cheyennes and Arapahoes have a strong sense of identity (Mann, 1997).

As more C&A students attended public schools, they were confronted with a system that did not reflect their home and/or traditional values or way of life. Mann (1997) writes about the experience of Alfred who attended school in El Reno. On his first day he shared:

We were in class when the bell rang and the children ran out and I did not know what was going on so I followed. Instead of playing I went around the corner and I started to roll a cigarette. I looked up to see a circle of white faces staring at me. About that time, I was jerked up by the back of my collar and marched to the office. They took my tobacco and could not understand my grandfather letting me smoke. (Mann, 1997, p 149).

Alfred's story illustrates what it is like for one culture to value the use of tobacco while another group views the use of tobacco as bad. Furthermore, Mann (1997) shares, "Indians are good as long as they are below them. Let an Indian become equal to or better than a white person then it

becomes a different situation. Whites cannot tolerate Indians being better than them” (p. 149). This attitude is still prevalent in today’s public school system.

The Cheyennes and Arapahoes understood the right to educate their children was taken away from them when they signed the Medicine Lodge Treaty. However, Alfred Whiteman, Sr., who was a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Business Committee, saw there was a lag in education among the tribal members. Working with his colleagues, he began to intensify efforts in education. The 13th Council passed a resolution in 1962 that awarded \$100 grants to its students who graduated from high school, college, postgraduate, art, and nursing programs. The business committee also allocated \$2,300 for education assistance for C&A children attending schools in the former reservation territory (Mann, 1997).

The C&A Tribes showed a commitment to education beyond the \$100 grants. The 13th Council of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Business Committee established an education program that provided financial assistance to tribal members. Most importantly, the purpose of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal Education Program was to further their education in institutions of higher education and/or trade schools. Not only did the tribes allocate funding for an education program, but they also created a six-member scholarship committee that awarded grants to students. Education was at the forefront for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes well before the Indian self-determination era. According to Mann (1997), “Regardless of attempts to assimilate them, they have retained their identity as Cheyennes and Arapahoes” (pp. 151-152).

Contemporary Education on “The People’s” Terms

Throughout the years of ever changing federal Indian policy towards Indian students and families, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes maintained their way of life. Their people were still rich

with their separate cultures and languages. The C&A people had their own expectations of formal education. They assumed it would be like their own ways of teaching and students would be self-reliant individuals. However, the reality was that students were being educated to live in a dual world. For white people, education was still a means to produce copper-skinned people who spoke, thought, and subscribed to the white Protestant way of life (Mann, 1997).

After the *Meriam Report* was published and led to legislation such as the Indian Reorganization Act (NIEA, n.d.), the Johnson O'Malley Act (McCoy, 2024), and the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (Mann, 1997), it seemed as if Indian education was going to be reformed and assimilation tactics were over. However, assimilation continued during the 1950s, when the government decided to terminate federal recognition and assistance to more than 100 tribes (NCAI, 2020). Termination targeted families and tribes with relocation programs and encouraged Indians to relocate from reservations to urban areas. My late paternal grandparents, William Whitlow and Geraldine Tallbull Morton, relocated to Chicago, Illinois. My father, the late Billy Whitlow, was born in Chicago in 1954. Two years later, after his brother was born, my grandmother returned home to Kingfisher to raise her family. This has had a profound impact on my family as well as others.

By 1965, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes became concerned about the survival of their children and wanted more opportunities for them. The 15th Council of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Business Committee made significant impact and progress regarding education for the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. First, they established a five-person scholarship committee with its own \$10,000 budget. The goal of the scholarship program was to provide financial aid and encouragement to students who were enrolled tribal members and chose to pursue an education

at a higher learning institution or a vocational school. The tribe covered as much as they could for students who were ineligible for BIA funding. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma were one of the first tribes in the nation to create their own scholarship program. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes had already begun implementing the concept of self-determination before it became federal Indian policy (Mann, 1997).

In 1968, with the urging of President Lyndon B. Johnson, federal Indian policy entered the self-determination period. The purpose of this policy was to end the termination era and encourage the development of self-governance and self-determination (NCAI, 2020). Once again, a congressional study was conducted on Indian education and Indian education policy. The *Kennedy Report* was published in 1969 and affirmed the low quality of virtually every aspect of Indian education in both BIA and public schools (NCAI, 2020). The findings of the *Kennedy Report* were similar to the *Meriam Report*, which was conducted four decades earlier and found that American educational systems and policies have failed American Indian students. The *Kennedy Report* recommended Indian involvement and control of Indian education programs (Mann, 1997). The *Kennedy Report* led to a monumental piece of legislation, the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. In passing this Act,

The Congress hereby recognizes the obligation of the United States to respond to the strong expression of Indian people for self-determination by assuring maximum Indian participation in the direction of educational as well as other Federal services to Indian communities so as to render such services more responsive to the needs and desires of those communities. (Mann, 1997, p. 165)

The Secretary of the Interior was to contract with Indian tribes to provide programs services to their tribal members. This legislation also added that the Johnson O'Malley Act was to establish local Indian parent committees who had the authority to approve or disapprove funds to meet the unique needs of Indian students (Mann, 1997).

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes have always been innovative with their educational programs and services. They understood the unique needs of their children and implemented several programs through the 1970s. Most notably, the 19th Council adopted a resolution in May 1974 to create a Cheyenne Bilingual Study, Training and Teaching Program administered through Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU). The purpose of this program was to close the communication gap between Indian students and their teachers in the public school system (Mann, 1997).

In 1972, students and families were very unhappy with the Hammon Public School district and students walked out. Hammon failed to ease racial conflict and graduate Indian students and excluded Indian parents from participating in the federally funded programs meant to educate their students. With funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of Indian Education, and from church groups and foundations, an alternative school was created in Hammon, Oklahoma. The school served students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and the children had Cheyenne language and culture classes. However, by 1977, funding began to drop, and the last year of operation was 1980-1981 (Mann, 1997).

In addition to the efforts being made to improve educational outcomes for C&A students, the 20th Council officially created the Cheyenne-Arapaho Department of Education on August 22, 1977. According to Mann (1997), the purpose of the department of education was to provide

“more comprehensive educational services and programs for greater numbers of Tribal members from early childhood to late adulthood” (p. 168). Due to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (McCoy, 2024), the following programs were to be operated under the U.S. Department of Education: Adult Education Program, Head Start Program, Higher Education Assistance Program, Incentive Action Program, Johnson O’Malley Program, and Vocational Education Training and Program Improvement Project. The Department of Education was responsible for existing programs as well as new programs as they were created and funded (Mann, 1997).

The U.S. Department of Education also became responsible for the Concho School, but the school closed, and its last academic year was 1981-1982. The reason for closure was a decline in enrollment that affected the budget. In its last operating year, half of the dormitory staff were tribal members. Once the doors closed, 200 students were affected. Some of the students and staff were directed to attend another BIA school – Riverside Indian School - about 45 miles south of El Reno. Riverside is still in operation to this day (Mann, 1997). *This school in Concho is where my office resides, ...where I’m typing this dissertation.*

Conclusion: The Road of Life—Past, Present, and Future

Mann (1997) asserts that the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes are two distinct people. Each has their own world view, unique experiences, and knowledge that contributes to their position in education. The final chapter of Mann’s (1997) book summarizes the treaties and massacres that impacted the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle wanted protection for his people, so he signed the Treaty of Little Arkansas and the historic Medicine Lodge Treaty. The

most significant stipulation of the Medicine Lodge Treaty was that compulsory education would be provided for Cheyenne and Arapaho children from ages six to sixteen.

Education that was learned in the home was usually provided by family members, most likely an elder or grandparent. C&A children learned through observation, by watching, and by listening. Cheyennes were hesitant to embrace formal education because they had their own ways, and they liked them better. Once formal education was introduced to the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation, white people used it to force civilization, education, and Christianity. Formal education persisted throughout the years and the Cheyennes and Arapahoes began to view education as a means for survival. Students began attending the public-school systems within the former reservation territory. According to Mann (1997), stereotypes, prejudice, and racism were prevalent in public schools and contributed to tribal students having a bad self-image and no motivation to go to school. Sadly, these issues persist today in western Oklahoma for Cheyenne and Arapaho students.

Formal education was viewed as negative by The People. The curriculum, personnel, and biased textbooks never centered American Indian people or their unique experiences. The Keeper of the Cheyenne Sacred Arrows once stated,

What is required is a new type of school that does not try to brainwash our kids. He visualizes a school that allows our children to grow up Cheyenne and happy but also teaches them to move well in the Veho⁴ world. (Mann, 1997, p. 183)

⁴ Ve'ho'e (sometimes spelled Vehoe or Wihio) is the Cheyenne term for spider as well as for white man (Mann, 1997, p. 14).

Although formal education offered valuable skills to function in white society, it was important for Cheyenne and Arapaho children's identities to be positively reaffirmed.

Indian education is a treaty obligation that is a federal responsibility. Cheyenne and Arapaho education has been subject to mission schools, on and off-reservation schools, and public schools, which all centered the three-pronged approach of civilization, Christianization, and education (Mann, 1997). For the future of C&A education, the goal is tribal control of formal education.

Dr. Henrietta Mann has made a significant impact with her work, her life, and her scholarship for Cheyenne and Arapaho people. During my doctoral studies I found myself constantly referring to her book to justify my thought process regarding education and tribal education departments. Once I read her book in its entirety and the passage, "on August 22, 1977, the 20th Council created the Cheyenne-Arapaho Department of Education" (p. 168), I knew exactly what I wanted to research and write about.

Dr. Mann's Great-Grandmother

Mann (1997) not only provides an educational history of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes; she also weaves stories of her great-grandmother throughout her work. By providing stories of her great-grandmother, she asserts the notion that knowing who you are and where you come from affects the way we pursue knowledge (Rhee, 2021). This is an example of decolonial feminist research. Mann's great-grandmother White Buffalo Girl was born in 1852 and reared as a traditional Cheyenne. During this time, all Cheyenne babies were loved, and she was no exception. She was taught from a young age to be quiet in front of elders, a lesson that was never forgotten. Most notably, White Buffalo Girl was a survivor of both the Sand Creek Massacre in

1864 and the Battle of Washita in 1868. As a result, she had a fear of having to flee and chose to keep her moccasins on all the time (Mann, 1997).

White Buffalo Girl is a product of Cheyenne education that was provided by extended family, and respected elders. The entire tribe was considered her teachers. During this time, she learned all the good ways of being Cheyenne. Education as an adolescent included language, ceremonies, value system, moral code, kinship system, tribal government, gender roles, customs, and traditions. Most importantly, she learned by watching and emulating her mother. She learned how to carry wood, put up and take down a teepee, cook, make clothing, and care for children. Once she reached puberty, she became White Buffalo Woman (Mann, 1997).

White Buffalo Woman married Big Red White Man, and they had two children: Crooked Nose Woman Miriam Mann and Spotted Horse Fred Mann. Their son Fred married Lucy White Bear, and they had two children, the oldest named for her aunt and a son named Holy Bird Henry Mann. Henry Mann married Lenora Wolfstongue, and they had two children. White Buffalo Woman lived to see the birth of Henry's oldest child, Henrietta Mann in 1934. Mann (1997) shares the significance of their relationship interwoven with education:

Shaped by external constraints, the lives of White Buffalo Woman and her great-granddaughter were dramatically different. Their education was antithetical: one Cheyenne-oriented, the other oriented to change, assimilation, and Christianity, as mandated by federal Indian policy. The two women were removed from each other by two generations, but they were blessed in getting to know and love one another. Each in her own time observed the white formal education process. (p. 24)

White Buffalo Woman survived massacres, battles, fragmentation of land, and the introduction of white man's education. Henrietta Mann, her great-granddaughter, experienced the impact massacres, battles, fragmentation of land, and the white man's education had on the C&A people.

White Buffalo Woman knew that living to see her first great-grandchild born was special. Mann (1997) shares what her great-grandmother told her grandson, "I have seen my [great] granddaughter. I have held her in my arms. I have offered her in prayer to the four sacred directions as one of The People" (p. 181). In 1936, White Buffalo Woman passed away and left her great-granddaughter to experience formal education (Mann, 1997).

Mann's work is intergenerational and centers not only on her great-grandmother's experience, but hers as well. Rhee (2021) states, "I am not separable from my mother, my mother's mother, and my mother's mother's mother" (p. 4). Mann's work is an example of writing what you know and that is not separate from who you are (Rhee, 2021).

My Work: An Extension of Mann's

During my classes and classwork, it was important for me to always center a C&A perspective and experience in my research and writing. I knew what was important to me as a researcher and what type of stories I wanted to tell. The C&A people continue to be spiritually, mentally, and physically sound although they have endured massacres, allotment, assimilation, termination, and civilization periods.

My research interests include TEDs/TEAs, Indigenous feminism, and Indigenous women's leadership. As of October 2025, I have published two book chapters (RedCorn et al.,

2024; Whitlow, 2022), one journal article (Whitlow, 2024), and another book chapter⁵ with Dr. Alex RedCorn is under review, all of which were focused on CADOE. Through my research and publications, I have discussed our education programming in the context of how we have worked to assert sovereignty. Through Mann's work we can see that the C&A Tribes have always been committed to education, and it has always been a priority.

In the journal article *From Theory to Practice: How the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education (Re)Centered Indian Education in Western Rural Oklahoma* (Whitlow, 2024), I share how TEDs can liberate their sovereign potential by utilizing three tenets from RedCorn's (2020) capacity building framework. I also share how CADOE asserts C&A values, beliefs, and worldviews through various program building efforts across early childhood to adult education contexts. I consider the most important sections of this work to be how we are looking to the future.

In October 2022, CADOE was awarded a State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) grant (Whitlow, 2024). The grant was awarded from the Office of Indian Education (OIE) and focused on enhancing educational choice for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. The grant is a three-year planning process to create a model for a charter school that centers C&A languages, cultures, beliefs, values, and worldviews. This is an opportunity to assert sovereignty and provide our students with an educational system that the Keeper of Sacred Arrows described as a place where our students can be happy but most importantly reinforce the strong identities of the Cheyenne and Arapaho people

⁵ RedCorn, A., & Whitlow, C. (Under Review). *Tribal education departments in Oklahoma*. In S. Hegwood & J. Pahdopony (Eds.), *On Indian ground: Oklahoma*.

Indigenous Women and Leadership

This study highlights the unique lived experiences and stories of Cheyenne and Arapaho women who have served as educational leaders. What is most unique about Indigenous women is that they experience oppression as Indigenous people first, and second as women. According to Mihesuah (2003), this is a result of “their varied economic situations, social values, appearances, and gender roles” (p. 53). Most importantly, Indigenous women are oppressed by men, women, non-native, and oddly enough, by other Natives (Mihesuah, 2003).

Indigenous women are at the intersection of learning about who they should be from their families and communities, but also from a Eurocentric society. As Smith (1999) writes:

For many Indigenous women, for example, their analyses have emerged from the intersections formed through the politics of Western feminism and the politics of their own Indigenous communities. Writing and talking about the experiences of women within these spaces have developed into a major research priority for Indigenous women. (p. 127)

Indigenous women have always been leaders in the home, in the community, and now in modern day tribal government systems. “Women’s and men’s roles may have been different, but neither was less important than the other” (Mihesuah, 2003, p. 42). The work of both men and women was needed; however, gender bias was inherited from Western society.

“Women, by and large, bring to leadership a greater sense of collaboration, an ability to view social, political and personal concerns in a uniquely interconnected female way” (Janda, 2007, p. 167). Janda (2007) shares the background and leadership experiences of LaDonna Harris and Wilma Mankiller, both political leaders at the tribal and national level. Being a leader

requires reflection and asking yourself the following question shared by LaDonna Harris: What am I responsible for and what can I contribute? This is an example of how Indigenous women's leadership is centered on the broader community as opposed to oneself. This also demonstrates how Indigenous women's leadership has always played a significant role in families, communities, and tribes.

Indigenous women like Ada Deer (Deer & Perdue, 2019), Wilma Mankiller (Mankiller & Wallis, 1993), and LaDonna Harris (Janda, 2007), who were tribal leaders at the tribal, state, and national levels, served in leadership capacities for their respective tribes and/or agencies.

Although they did not work for TEDs of TEAs, they offer important leadership lessons regarding politics at the tribal, state, and national levels that is beneficial to know and understand. Both Harris and Mankiller believed there are two fundamental beliefs that hinder female leadership in politics. "First, both believe[d] that Indian women have historically played a vital role within their tribes and that sexism came from white culture" (Janda, 2007, p. 172). Secondly, and most importantly, Harris and Mankiller both believe that men and women engage in leadership differently and both argue that women are more collaborative as opposed to men (Janda, 2007).

Ada Deer is from the Menominee Nation from Wisconsin. She is recognized on the national level due to being the first woman to lead the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). She was instrumental in reversing the termination of the Menominee Tribe and moving the Tribe toward sovereignty and self-determination (Deer & Perdue, 2019). In Deer & Perdue (2019) they discuss Deer's goal when working with the tribe and she "wanted to be useful, to help people overcome obstacles and challenge the circumstances that held them back" (p. 21). In her autobiography, Deer reflects on her childhood, her education, and how federal Indian policy had an impact on

her family. Based on her experience and ability to be self-reflexive, she knew she did not want to grow up the same as her parents and believed education was the answer. Deer & Perdue (2019) write, “the conditions that I saw on the Menominee Reservation helped me articulate a goal of helping Indian people” (p. 21). This is an example of how the experiences of Indigenous women in leadership as children have a deep and profound impact on their leadership styles.

Today, more Indigenous women are being elected to office at the national, state, local, and tribal levels. More Indigenous women are also being chosen to lead tribes, departments, and programs. By serving as leaders, Mihesuah (2003) shares, “... taking leadership roles is a way of regaining the prestige and power their ancestors once held and assuming the responsibility for the welfare of their tribe” (p. 143). Indigenous women who are leading education departments for their Tribal Nations are assuming responsibility for the education of their tribal citizens.

In Minthorn and Chavez’s (2015) *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, a collection of leadership stories, Cheryl Crazy Bull contributes an essay in which she writes, about tribal educational leadership in higher education. Crazybull (2015) asserts that leadership “is a very traditional tribal experience because it is based first in how a person acts in his or her immediate setting then more broadly in how one interacts with other” (p. 65). Recognition of traditional and tribal values and experiences is an important aspect of leadership.

Shotton and Minthorn (2020) share, “the scholarship on Indigenous women has historically failed to address our modern roles and realities” (p. 75) as Indigenous women leaders in not only higher education, but other educational arenas as well. Shotton and Minthorn (2020) reiterate the importance of women’s roles in tribes and communities, and the culture, spirituality, and tribal values they assert in their leadership practices. Most importantly, Shotton and

Minthorn (2020) cite “the need to create a community-based leadership model that integrates the roles, values, and holistic nature of the Indigenous communities” (p. 76). This is critical because not every Tribal Nation is the same and not every community is the same. This is especially important for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes who are recognized as one tribe, but have two separate worldviews, cultures, and languages. Leadership for Indigenous people is often centered on community, because that is what we see in action every day.

Another important aspect of Indigenous women’s leadership is knowing who you are and where you come from. This includes being grounded in spiritual and cultural practices from your respective tribe. Mililani Trask (as cited in Mihesuah, 2003) shares, “as Indigenous women, we have rich traditions upon which we can rely and from which we can and should draw our sustenance” (p. 170). Janda (2007) reaffirms this notion and shares that believing in traditional culture lends confidence to female leaders. Indigenous values, morals, and beliefs are all at the center of Indigenous women’s leadership. Indigenous women cannot lead if they do not know who they are and where they come from.

In March 2024, I hosted a podcast for Cheyenne and Arapaho Productions. The topic was Experiences of TED Leaders. The panel consisted of Indigenous women who have experience working in tribal education departments for their respective tribes. One of the most interesting questions brought up was, do you consider yourself a leader? Each woman sitting at the table hesitated and all responded with a resounding “no.”

Shotton (2015) shares, “I have held various positions and titles throughout my career that are considered ‘leadership positions,’ but I do not personally identify myself as a leader” (p. 144). Her reasoning for making this statement is because she views herself as part of a larger

community that works toward a greater goal. In contrast, leadership from a western perspective is full of rules often seen in a black/white, right/wrong perspective and there is no room for a different perspective.

What we know about Indigenous peoples and their experiences is that they are unique. Leadership is no exception; our experiences and stories are unique because of our perspective. Shotton (2015) further explains, “from a Western perspective the term leadership is too often focused on the individual and centers on the notion of power or influence over others” (p. 145). From her Indigenous perspective, Indigenous leadership means what you can do for others or how you can be of service to families, students, and communities. What we know as Indigenous women is that we have our place, as do our men; however, many of us are reluctant to call ourselves leaders because we know that it may not be our place to do so (Shotton, 2015).

In my professional experience I have rarely seen a man hesitate to speak, share his opinion, or call himself a leader. In that same podcast we asked ourselves, if men can do so without hesitation, why can't we? These questions lead to the broader context of understanding Indigenous ways of life. We know there are elders who have more experience, knowledge, and wisdom than we possess, and we respect them for it. We also know that some Indigenous tribes are patriarchal, and it is not our place as women to speak first, walk ahead, or lead. However, in modern day government organizations Indigenous women are leading the way in obtaining college degrees, getting experience, and returning home to serve their people. Indigenous leadership focuses on the collective, service is valued, and the actions of leaders are determined by the needs of the people (Shotton, 2015).

As stated previously, Indigenous women are unique because, “We are *American Indian Women* in that order. We are oppressed, first and foremost as American Indians, as peoples colonized by the United States of America, *not* as women” (Lorelei Means in Green, 2007, p. 94). While this statement is true, Indigenous women face oppression as women as well. Their experience includes the intersectionality of sexism and racism. In comparison to white women, who are primarily oppressed through patriarchy, we experience oppression as Indigenous people then again as women. Indigenous women experience racism and then discrimination (Tippeconnic Fox, 2009). If we do not recognize the unique reality of the oppression Indigenous women in leadership positions face, how will we address it and move forward?

Indigenous Leadership in Education: Broadly Speaking

The landscape of Indian education is vast. The subgroups include BIE, Title VI, TEDs/TEAs, early childhood, secondary education, and postsecondary higher education. While there is minimal literature on Indigenous leadership in education, i.e., BIE administrators (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015) or higher education leadership (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015), there is little to no literature on leadership in TEDs/TEAs.

Minthorn and Chavez (2015) and Pewewardy et al. (2022) are Indigenous scholars focusing on Indigenous leadership in education. While Minthorn and Chavez focus on leadership in higher education, there are several chapters in their book, *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, that can apply to TED leadership, i.e., Crazy Bull, Pewewardy, and Shotton. Crazy Bull (2015) shares, “Education in tribal communities, indeed with tribal people anywhere, is a tremendous responsibility” (p. 64). Indigenous people who are selected to serve as leaders don’t

take their responsibility lightly. TED leaders are not only administrators, but they are also advocates for their students, families, and communities. Crazy Bull (2015) asserts:

When I advocate for educational access, I am advocating for the opportunity for Indigenous People to have access to whatever formal or informal education they desire. The educational systems that support Native people need to be rooted in acceptance of traditional tribal history and knowledge, and contemporary life. (p. 66)

Crazy Bull shares an important aspect of tribal leadership; not only do you have to be a leader, administrator, and advocate but you also must know who you are and where you come from.

Pewewardy (2015) shares his perspective of leadership: “The first step in becoming self-determined is examining ‘the sovereign self’” (p. 71). This means asking yourself critical questions like, what does it mean to be Cheyenne and Arapaho or what does it mean to be an Indigenous leader? This first step requires self-reflexivity and critical self-reflection that leads to better understanding leadership from a tribal perspective. Although Pewewardy writes about leadership, he does not specify TED leadership. However, the lesson of examining the sovereign self is applicable to any field of leadership within Indigenous education. Like Pewewardy, Secatero (2015) reiterates how important it is to ask yourself critical questions before pursuing a leadership role, such as, why am I becoming a leader? Both scholars understand Indigenous leadership is about critical self-reflection and being self-aware.

Exploring Indigenous Education Beyond Cheyenne and Arapaho Contexts: TEDs/TEAs and Sovereignty

This section provides necessary context for the topics related to this study. The history of Indian education, sovereignty, TEDs/TEAs, educational leadership, and Indigenous women’s

leadership are important to the Indian education landscape. While this research focuses on TEDs and TEAs and educational leadership perspectives, it is critical to understand how we can liberate our sovereign potential.

“Historically, policies developed under federal Indian law frameworks served to eradicate or assimilate Indigenous peoples” (Mackey et al., 2022, p. 149). Research shows that educational systems were not created for Indigenous children and families. The federal government made a commitment through treaties and executive orders to provide education for Indigenous people in exchange for land. As a result of this commitment, it was assumed that Indigenous education was inferior to western education. While TEDs’ and TEAs’ primary role is to support the education of tribal citizens, they are taking back control by assuming the responsibility of educating their tribal citizens.

Indigenous education is overwhelmingly being led by Indigenous women. This includes TEDs/TEAs, Title VI programs, early childhood, elementary, secondary, and higher education. While their stories and experiences are often overlooked, Indigenous women are more than likely to “simply do the work that needs to be done” (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015, p. 144). Indigenous woman educators are creating relationships, building partnerships, and prioritizing educational outcomes for their students. As Indigenous women continue to build capacity and assert tribal sovereignty for their education departments and Tribal Nations, their work is benefitting the broader community (Shotton & Minthorn, 2020).

Tribal Nations have always prioritized tribal sovereignty. We have the right to govern ourselves, and we have the right to educate ourselves. As Lomawaima & McCarty (2002) share,

“Tribes have a singular legal status that both predates and is recognized by the U.S. Constitution” (p. 284). Sovereignty is an inherent right and puts Tribal Nations in control.

Educational sovereignty is described by Lomawaima & McCarty (2002) as “... the right of a people to self-government, self-determination, and self-education. Sovereignty includes the right to linguistic and cultural expression according to local languages and norms—the right to ‘write, speak, and act from a position of agency’” (p. 284). Indigenous people have a unique history and political relationship with the United States (Brayboy et. al., 2015) that no other marginalized group has. The only people who can define sovereignty and self-determination are Tribal Nations. RedCorn (2020) shares that to liberate educational sovereignty tribes must unlock intellectual sovereignty.

Between 1994 and 2005, Native American Rights Fund (NARF) attorney, Melody McCoy, published an education series entitled *Tribalizing Indian Education*. The series provided the first significant literature regarding TEDs and TEAs. In addition to NARF providing legal documentation for Indian Education, they also contributed to the publication of Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (TEDNA) annual reports in the early 2000s.

In the Tribal Education Departments report from the 1980s and 1990s, NARF assisted tribes in establishing tribal education codes. Tribal education codes provide tribes assistance in establishing authority as a sovereign government over education, including public schools (McCoy, 1999). TEDs serve students from pre-school to post-secondary education and often coordinate with other tribal agencies to provide services to students. According to McCoy, “TEDs can positively impact educational opportunities for tribal students” (p. 6). NARF also advocates on behalf of TEDs because they understand that tribes need federal funding to develop

education departments. The growth and expansion of TEDs allow them to be in a better position to negotiate or enter into agreements with an LEA or SEA.

TEDs and TEAs are created by the sovereign governments of tribes and oversee the early childhood, K-12 education, higher education, and adult education of its tribal members (Beesley et al., 2012). Most often, TEDs can be found in the executive branch of government and are sometimes referred to as Tribal Education Agency or Education Division (Bowers, 2010). TEDs are responsible for supporting the education of their tribal members (Mackety et al., 2009). As stated previously, there are 574 federally recognized tribes but only 200+ tribes have a TED/TEA division or program.

“Sovereign tribes also have an inherent right to regulate the education of their members. This tribal authority extends to its members regardless of whether they attend public, private or Bureau of Indian Education schools, either on or off the reservation” (Mackety et al., 2009, p. 4). According to RedCorn et al. (2023), 93% of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students attend public school systems and 66% of those students attend rural schools. Only 7% of AI/AN students attend BIE schools. TEDs continue to build capacity and seek tribal control over education.

TEDNA and NARF have published several reports since the early 2000s that highlight TEDs across the U.S. and the work they are doing for their Tribal Nations. In 2010, Amy Bowers, NARF Staff Attorney, and TEDNA interviewed the following tribes: Cherokee Nation (Oklahoma), Hoopa Valley Tribe (California), Chickasaw Nation (Oklahoma), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (North Carolina), Pueblo and Jemez (New Mexico), Seminole Tribe of Florida, and the Oglala Sioux Tribe (South Dakota). Surveys and telephone interviews were conducted.

The report highlights how each TED and TEA are not the same and are as unique as their Tribal Nations. All TEDs that participated in the study expressed frustration with the lack of available data on tribal students (Bowers, 2010).

Adult Learning and Leadership Literature Relevant to Tribal Education Leadership

While there is a lack of literature on TEDs/TEAs, there is also a literature gap that provides a connection between tribal organizations like TEDs/TEAs and adult learning leadership theory and praxis. Adult learning and leadership practices can be useful to TEDs/TEAs because the organization is made up of adult learners who are putting educational leadership into practice every day. This study is an example of how adult learning and leadership literature can intersect with tribal education departments.

Theory is useful but the reality of working in a TED/TEA is that there is little to no discussion about theory and/or big concepts like adult learning theory, or even deep legal discussions around sovereignty. Most often, employees skip that phase of learning and go directly into focusing on practice, or program execution. Although Elias & Merriam (2005) argue that “theory without practice leads to an empty idealism, and action without philosophical reflection leads to mindless activism” (p. 5). While this statement is true, philosophical reflection is not only subject to western philosophy and idealism, Indigenous peoples and Native Nations have their own worldviews that includes philosophy, relationality, ethics, and so much more. Elias & Merriam (2005) continue to assert that “we act for reasons, good and/or bad, and generally have some understanding of what we are doing, why we are doing it in the way we do” (p. 5). Philosophy and theory can also be guided by Indigenous culture, languages, stories, and worldviews. Elias & Merriam (2005) also refer to the work of McKenzie (1991) and worldview

construction, explaining how “worldview construction involves the ongoing development and maturation of understanding: Understanding of the world, of others, of self, of understanding itself” (p. 135). There are also resonant with teachings within Indigenous families and communities like, be good to people or do things in a good way which can translate to guiding adult learners in TEDs/TEAs that are serving Indigenous students, families, and communities. However, it would be powerful to do this in ways that directly align with Indigenous cultural systems, as well as the political systems of Native Nations. Often tribal nations align their vision, mission, or strategic plan with tribal values, beliefs, and teachings. For example, the C&A Tribes often ask how our services are improving the overall quality of life.

When considering the intersections between the fields of adult education and Indigenous education, overall Indian education research has typically been siloed to K-12, higher education, and BIE, not the birth to grave issues that TEDs and TEAs must address. In addition to the lack of literature on TEDs and TEAs mentioned previously, there is also a lack of synergy between Indian education and adult learning and leadership, and how adult learning shows up in Indigenous contexts where there is birth to grave programming.

Houle (1972) shares this definition of adult education:

Adult education is the process by which men and women (along, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness; or it is any process by which individuals, group, or institutions try to help men and women improve in those ways. (p. 4)

Adult education can easily be applied to tribal organizations and its employees, but much of the adult education research and literature is based mostly on a white-Eurocentric perspective. To be

inclusive of non-western perspectives of adult education Clark et al. (2011) states, “Non-Western cultures offer a perspective on adult learning and adult development that is communal rather than individualistic and interdependent rather than independent, valuing family, community, self-sacrifice, and spirituality” (p. 17). It is here that the field of adult learning and leadership can find synergy with Indigenous education.

Adult education can be applied to organizations like TEDs/TEAs who are the providers and its employees who are the adult learners. Not only are we supporting the education of our tribal citizens, but our employees ensure the TED/TEA meets organizational goals. Again, TEDs/TEAs function within a tribal government structure whose primary goal is to improve the overall quality of life through services. As an adult learner in this type of organization you are being asked questions like, how are you meeting the needs of your students, families, and communities? Adult education is also described in Ross-Gordon et al. (2017) as a process where people who are adults undergo systematic and sustained activities to understand new knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. Adult education can provide TEDs/TEAs with meaningful resources, insight, and guidance for the betterment of the organization.

There is a need to address the gap in research between Indigenous contexts and adult learning and leadership. RedCorn (2020) asserts, “The habits of educational systems, and the people who work in them, are slow to change and ongoing assimilationist influence is pervasive and deep” (p. 6). While RedCorn urges tribal nations, TEDs, and TEAs to (re)center educational systems, organizations must be responsible for (re)centering their employees as well RedCorn (2020) shares, “many leaders in Native communities have inherited the habits of Westernized systems and/or their employees’ work experience within them” (p. 6). We are critical of public

education and its systems; however, these same systems are educating us. According to NIEA (n.d.) approximately 93% of Native students attend public schools. Native students attend, graduate, and inherit westernized thinking and are bringing that to the workplace. It is for these reasons I've previously (Whitlow, 2024) stated, "Critical self-reflection is necessary and sometimes includes reflecting on one's own experience in public school education" (p. 39). Since teacher education and ongoing professional development is inherently also adult education, this is yet another opportunity to find synergy with adult learning literature, because these concepts can be applied across all fields of research and practice where ongoing professional development is important.

To address the disconnect between a tribal organization and its employees, it is the organization's responsibility to offer the opportunity to reflect, learn, and grow. In RedCorn's (2020) model, one of the most important tenets is fostering professional growth across systems. While it is the responsibility of TEDs and TEAs to support the education of its tribal citizens, it should also be their responsibility to support the development of its employees. One way to foster the development of employees is to provide professional development. This is inherently an effort to create a healthy ecosystem for adult learners. This approach allows TEDs an opportunity to provide a better network to help their employees be in a state of ongoing learning about federal Indian policy, history of Indian education, and various funding sources and laws that impact Indian education programs. TED employees are not entering the workforce with this specific type of knowledge, but they end up learning it on the job. As I previously stated, "The challenge was intersecting C&A worldviews and fighting through dissonance of what we are taught in public school education" (Whitlow, 2024, p. 39). Professional development is a way for

employees to understand how it is necessary for TED employees to understand the students, families, and communities they are serving. This is a great opportunity for adult learning to find more synergy in the field of adult learning and leadership.

Adult Education in Practice

Tribal nations can put adult learning and leadership into practice through organization and administration. The three most important and practical areas for TEDs to put adult learning and leadership into practice is through program planning, strategic planning, and funding. Program planning means creating opportunities for growth and learning for employees, community members, and administrators. Strategic planning is a common practice that separates organizations from those that succeed or fail (Schmidt & Yelich Biniecki, 2023). Lastly, Yelich Biniecki & Schmidt (2017) share, “securing funding is an essential role for administration of adult and continuing education programs in higher education, nonprofit, for-profit, and governmental sector” (p. 363). TEDs and TEAs need funding either from gaming revenue, state, or federal to operate and provide educational opportunities for students and families.

Program Planning

Daffron and Caffarella (2021) also describe how, “program planning becomes a negotiated activity between and among educators, learners, organizations, and other stakeholders, all of whom bring their own beliefs and contexts with them to the planning table” (p. 33). This framework is a helpful source to rethink program planning processes and evaluate if we are effective program planners. Brockett & Hiemstra (1998) also share how program planning does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, “It is driven by values; values of the organization, values of the adult education practitioner, values of the clientele, and values of

society” (p. 116). Values should be intertwined with our clients, organization, and community as an employee working for a tribal government. Lastly, program planning “is a process involving the implantation of values” (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1998, p. 117). But, in a Cheyenne and Arapaho specific context, a critical Indigenous leadership perspective might prompt the question: Are actual tribal values present, or have we imported assimilationist practices into our work culture since we rely heavily on westernized institutions? Again, leadership practice that looks at the intersections of program planning literature and Indigenous leadership literature, particularly in the context of CADOE and TEDs, would be very valuable.

Furthermore, Yelich Biniecki (2017) provides a program planning approach that can be useful to tribal organizations, TEDs, and TEAs. Yelich Biniecki (2017) asserts, “Program planning for adult learners is a specific area of research involving inquiries into such topics as need assessments, negotiating, building stakeholder support, facilitating dialogue, event management, marketing, and evaluation” (p. 58). All the topics outlined by Yelich Biniecki are what employees in tribal education departments are already doing, most times without prior experience. While TEDs/TEAs are not creating educational program for adult learners, the program planners are adult learners. Additionally, program planners in Indigenous educational contexts are creating learning programs for students in either early childhood, K-12, or in higher education. Lastly, Yelich Biniecki (2017) affirms that “input from members of the ethnic communities with whom we live, and the program planner serves as the cultural broker and community connector” (p. 61), which is applicable in Indigenous communities. TED/TEA employees, who are adult learners and program planners, are the liaison between the student, family, community, and education department.

Strategic Planning

Schmidt & Yelich Biniecki (2023) define strategic planning as “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it” (p. 174). TEDs and TEAs are organizations that must understand what you do and what you want to become (Schmidt & Yelich Biniecki, 2023). Not all tribal organizations or TEDs/TEAs have strategic plans, but those organizations that include this process are moving forward and making progress.

Schmidt & Yelich Biniecki (2023) list why strategic planning should be important to adult educators. The following three are the most important when applying to tribal organizations, TEDs and TEAs:

- All organizations operate within continually changing environments and all are continually changing internally as well.
- The strategic planning process can help educational organizations thrive and grow.
- Strategic planning requires knowledge of internal and external factors that others in the organization may not have. (p. 171)

To move forward employees must understand the current state of the organization. Strategic planning can help an organization find success, but it does not guarantee it (Schmidt & Yelich Biniecki, 2023).

Every employee and adult learner in a TED/TEA should be included, informed, and provided an opportunity to give feedback about the strategic planning process. It is the responsibility of the organization to provide that opportunity to its adult learners. Strategic

planning is a process that can be good and can move an organization forward; however, as a leader it is your responsibility to educate employees as to why *the process* is necessary.

Funding

Administration for tribal organizations, TEDs, and TEAs are responsible for every expenditure. Additionally, administrators are not only responsible for securing funding but for advocating for continued funding. CADOE receives money from gaming revenue, state, and federal funding agencies. Yelich Biniecki & Schmit (2017) affirm, “Securing funding may be one of the more stressful roles administrators play” (p. 363). It is important for current and future TED/TEA administrators to under the role funding factors into their job duties and job performance.

CADOE relies heavily on grants from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for Head Start Program funding and from the United States Department of Education for discretionary grants. All grants and funding have their own unique requirements based on the funding agency. Yelich Biniecki & Schmit (2017) state, “Grants may be internal, or monies that the parent organization provides for specific initiatives” (p. 364). Lastly, learning how to effectively communicate internally and externally why a TED/TEA should receive that funding is another skill that is necessary for administrators (Schmidt & Yelich Biniecki, 2023).

All the recommendations provided by the work of Yelich Biniecki & Schmit (2017, 2023) are applicable to TED/TEA administrators. Every organization is different, and tribal governments are no exception. Tribal administrators must understand the uniqueness of a TED/TEA and the various funding sources, but also how to continue to assert sovereignty for their respective tribal nation.

Summary

The landscape of Indian education is vast, but there is still a lack of understanding of what TEDs and TEAs are and how they function. It would be highly productive for TED and TEA leadership if there was a more concerted effort to build synergy around research and practice from Indigenous education and adult learning and leadership. Adult education and leadership are a field that is useful for TEDs and TEAs, and all would benefit by increasing synergy with Indigenous perspectives and scholarship.

Conceptual Frameworks

Kovach (2021) states, “A clearly articulated conceptual framework in research makes visible our assumptions about the world and how we will proceed in conducting and interpreting our research from that perspective” (p. 44). A conceptual framework guides the researcher and is built by the researcher as opposed to being only based only on prior theory. Additionally, Kovach (2013) shares, “In conducting research, the explicitness of our choices and the beliefs that influence them send a purposeful message about who we are as researchers” (p. 44). As a result, Indigenous research benefits from conceptual frameworks that are based on Indigenous stories, experiences, and perspectives because as Kovah (2013) asserts, “Western research conceptual frameworks heighten the potential for a Eurocentrism that reproduces deficit theorizing of Indigenous experience” (p. 45).

The conceptual frameworks outlined in this literature review inform this research focused on CADOE and the stories of woman leaders. I begin with an overview of Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2006) as a theory that broadly informs this work, but more specifically I utilize Indigenous feminism (Barker, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shanley, 1984; St. Denis, 2007) and RedCorn’s

(2020) model for *Liberating Sovereign Potential*. I have previously utilized RedCorn's (2020) model in an article in *The Rural Educator* entitled *From Theory to Practice: How the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education (Re)Centered Education in Western Rural Oklahoma*. This research extends that work with a focus on Indigenous women in leadership. It is important when conducting Indigenous research that we include Indigenous perspectives, frameworks, and an Indigenous research lens because they are critical of western research (Smith, 2019).

Tribal Nations had educational systems and practices in place prior to European contact. According to Mann (1997), "Cheyennes over time had developed sophisticated concepts of education to prepare their children for satisfying lives in an adult world" (p. 15). Curriculum for Tribal Nations was holistic with philosophy, history, and language at the forefront. After formal education was introduced to tribal people, they were forced to learn from a western perspective that included religion, language, history, and way of life (Mann, 1997).

Since the introduction to formal/western education, Indigenous people have had to assimilate to a way of life that was not created by them or for them. That assimilation process continues today. For example, RedCorn et al. (2023) shares, 93% of American Indian/Alaska Native children are educated in public schools that are ill-prepared to teach cultural knowledges or languages. Public school education still adheres to a western/Eurocentric ideology that is inclusive of curriculum, teachers, administrators, and standards. As Tribal Nations learn how to exercise their unique political status as sovereign nations, they are prioritizing their tribal citizens' education, health, and wellness. Part of being a sovereign nation is being able to not only govern ourselves, but to educate ourselves as well. Overall, these frameworks allow us to center Indigenous perspectives in the research, as well as sovereignty.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

One of the most critical and impactful conceptual frameworks for Indigenous research was created by Dr. Bryan Brayboy. TribalCrit “allow[s] [us] to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government” (Brayboy, 2006, p. 427). This is why Indigenous research is unique because we must first acknowledge the sovereign political status of Indigenous people. Furthermore, it is important to read and understand research through an Indigenous lens.

Brayboy (2006) outlines the nine tenets of TribalCrit as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory: they make up theory and are therefore real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (pp. 429-430)

The fourth tenet includes four important concepts: tribal autonomy, self-determination, self-identification, and tribal sovereignty. While defining tribal autonomy, the most important word used is control. Tribal Nations have control over land bases, natural resources, and tribal national boundaries. Brayboy (2006) goes on to define self-identification as “the ability and legitimacy for groups to define themselves and to create what it means to be Indian” (p. 434). This statement is important because tribal nations have always known who they are, but western education took precedence, and we lost our way of life. Tribal Nations are in positions now where we can define what it means to be Cheyenne and Arapaho in educational systems.

TribalCrit’s fifth tenet centers culture, knowledge, and power and how we understand them through an Indigenous lens. According to Mann (1997) “Each [person] was educated to be a good Arapaho or a good Cheyenne—and they stood in stark contrast to the white American schooled in the formal education system” (pp. 15-16). TribalCrit affirms what Indigenous people have known about cultural knowledge for thousands of years. Knowledge and understanding are defined differently by various cultural groups. TribalCrit shares that Indigenous ways of knowing and book smarts are different, but both are useful. It is more powerful to utilize all forms of knowledge that are available.

The final tenet identified by Brayboy (2006) focuses on theory and practice. Not only is it important to learn theory and conduct research, but also to put it into practice, which leads to

social change. The social change of utmost importance is the impact of TEDs/TEAs, tribal governments, and communities. Brayboy (2006) argues that “we must expose structural inequalities and assimilatory process and work toward debunking and deconstructing them” (p. 440). The next step is working to create structures and systems that address the real and future needs of tribal peoples and communities. Identifying a process for social change is necessary because tribal communities want change but often do not know how to do it. TribalCrit aligns with the Liberating Sovereign Potential model (RedCorn, 2020) and has the potential to create a “how to” process for TEDs and TEAs. While this is not explicitly a framework guiding this research, it informs the frameworks below that are more closely connected to the research design.

Indigenous Feminism

Indigenous people are subject to erasure and Indigenous women endure double erasure because we are first Indigenous and second women (Grande, 2015). As stated in Green (2007), “feminism is an ideology based on political analysis that takes women’s experiences seriously and is played out politically by women’s groups that generally have characteristic processes of organization and action” (p. 20). Aboriginal, Native American, and Indigenous feminism is unique because the issues raised are colonialism, racism, sexism, and how they violate human rights (Green, 2007).

Indigenous feminism provides a philosophical and political way to conceptualize and resist the oppression Indigenous people and women experience (Green, 2007). Waterman (2018) shares the need for Indigenous feminism “is important to my work as an Indigenous scholar as an emphasis on the re-, as in re-claiming our story, the re-introduction of histories and stories, the

re-mapping” (p. 181). Indigenous feminism is a critical lens of mainstream/white women’s feminism. By western standards, knowledge is considered power, not a responsibility. This contradicts Indigenous educational systems.

My research on Indigenous feminism includes a community-based perspective that considers the experiences, stories, and beliefs of Indigenous women. Tippeconnic Fox (2021) so eloquently shared the difference between Indigenous and white women’s feminism. Indigenous feminism is about responsibility, while white women’s feminism is about rights. Waterman (2018) reinforces Tippeconnic Fox’s thoughts by stating, “Indigenous feminism is about responsibility and relationship to our communities; it is about the benefit and empowerment of our community” (p. 182). Indigenous woman leaders carry the immense responsibility of their families, communities, and roles in their tribal nations. Community-based Indigenous feminism focuses on the following four tenets: tribal sovereignty, empowerment of women, empowerment of communities, and sexism.

Tribal Sovereignty

Luana Ross (2009) and Kate Shanley (1984) describe what makes Indigenous feminism unique - the belief in tribal sovereignty. Ross (2009) shares, “feminism has a special meaning for Native women because, as Indigenous people, we are concerned with issues of sovereignty” (p. 41). Ross also believes the heart and soul of feminism is tribal sovereignty. It is our responsibility to promote sovereignty. “From the knot or relationships is born our histories, identity, the traditional ways in which we govern ourselves, our beliefs, our relationship to the land, and how we feed, clothe, house, and takes care of our families, communities, and Nations” (Smith, 2005, p. 129). Indigenous women carry tremendous responsibility.

Empowerment of Women

The work of Luana Ross (2009) is centered on feminism. Throughout her writing she examines how other feminist writers either critique or embrace feminism as an Indigenous women's movement. In the same breath, the heart and soul of Indigenous feminism also include the empowerment of women. Indigenous women are unique in their roles as mentors to other young Indigenous women because in addition to being mentors, they take on the roles of sister, aunts, cousin, daughter, and at times an auntie mom.

Seeks to Empower Communities

Barker (2015) acknowledges that Indigenous feminism can go in different directions. She also asserts that authentic identities of Indigenous women are connected to "putting Indigenous peoples into relationships and responsibilities with one another that reflect their 'original instructions' about how to live in this world with each other" (p. 11). Indigenous women are interconnected by the responsibility they carry for their families and communities. According to Ross (2009), feminism "seeks to empower communities" (p. 50). This is significant because it never occurred to me that what I was taught as a tribal citizen would apply to a theory of feminism.

Sexism

Patriarchy is a colonial structure we have adopted in modern day tribal organizations and sexism is not unique to Indigenous women. St. Denis (2007) states (as cited in Green, 2007), "I may have some things in common with feminist struggles, especially against the injustices resulting from patriarchal, misogynist, and sexist ideologies that have for so long been a foundation in Euro-western societies" (p. 34). Although societies and tribes can be patrilineal and

men are often given the role in decision-making, it is not necessarily misogynistic or sexist.

Mihesuah (2003) shares, “Our tribe and others which were matriarchal have become assimilated and have adopted the cultural values of the larger society, and, in so doing, we’ve adopted sexism” (p. 42). Once the behavior is adopted and maintained in modern day society and tribal organizations, that is when it becomes problematic for Indigenous women.

Indigenous women are subject to sexism in modern day tribal organizations because the system created was borrowed from Euro-western governments who believe in a traditional patriarchal ideology. Smith (2005) argues that Indigenous feminisms/activists still struggle against sexism not only in Native communities but society at-large. Wilma Mankiller (Smith, 2005) provides an example of sexism experienced during her career:

No one challenged me on the issues, not once. Instead, I was challenged mostly because of one fact—I am female. The election became an issue of gender. It was one of the first times I had ever really encountered overt sexism...(people) said having a female run our tribe would make the Cherokees the laughingstock of the tribal world. (p. 121)

I have served in a leadership/supervisory position for my tribal organization for the past 18 years. Similarly, during my tenure sexism is either subtle or overt and operates in full force as of today.

Indigenous feminism provides an opportunity to reclaim space in research. This also applies to women from other marginalized groups who are sharing stories and lived experiences that are important to their communities. Indigenous feminism includes the work of women from First Nations, Native American, and scholars from Australia and New Zealand (Waterman, 2018). This study shares stories and lived experiences from Cheyenne and Arapaho women who have served as educational leaders for the betterment of our students, families, and communities.

“By reclaiming their own tribal perspectives on gender, they are engaging in a unique ethic of decolonization” (Deer, 2015, p. 30).

There is not one clear definition of Indigenous feminism. Indigenous women are unique and “vary in their cultural ideologies, appearance, and social and moral values” (Mihesuah, 2003, p. 159). Figure 2.1 shows the four tenets of Indigenous feminism outlined in this study

Figure 1. *Indigenous Feminism Conceptual Framework*

Conceptual Framework



It is important to acknowledge that this is just one interpretation of Indigenous feminism and does not define who Indigenous women are. The findings in this study blend these concepts throughout Chapter 4 in various ways. It is also important to acknowledge that many Indigenous women may not call themselves feminists. Therefore, this study is not meant to label Indigenous women but rather label our stories and lived experiences.

Liberating Sovereign Potential

Liberating Sovereign Potential: A Working Education Capacity Building Model for Native Nations by RedCorn (2020) provides a comprehensive framework for TED and TEA

leaders. This working model provides not only a process for navigating across multiple systems, but most importantly how to liberate a nation's sovereign potential. According to RedCorn, "leaders in Indigenous education envision how to improve access and influence in the education of their citizens while navigating entangled educational systems and bureaucratic realities" (p. 2). As stated previously, literature and research TEDs and TEAs is lacking. RedCorn continues to be the leading scholar centering the importance of TEDs/TEAs.

Frameworks such as TribalCrit and Liberating Sovereign Potential are critical to Indigenous Education research. Indigenous conceptual frameworks provide a lens for understanding Indigenous students' experiences. Tribal employees are doing important and critical work for their tribal nations; this study provides a better understanding of this type of work.

While there is significant literature about Indigenous/Indian Education, most notably in higher education and PK-12, a gap remains for TEDs/TEAs. The most significant TED/TEA research has been conducted by RedCorn. In his 2020 article on liberating sovereign potential, RedCorn writes, "The purpose of this conceptual article is to introduce a working model for educational leaders in Native nations to liberate educational sovereignty" (p. 1) for TED/TEA leaders. As stated previously, many tribal nations have TEDs/TEAs in their governmental structures, but they have yet to reach their full potential because there is a disconnect between wanting to make progress but not knowing how to do it.

For this study, the concepts from RedCorn (2020) that informed the data collection and analysis the most were focused on the following: 1) building capacity and 2) asserting sovereignty. Overall, RedCorn's model provides a step-by-step process for how a tribal nation

can understand educational sovereignty, why it's important, how to assert sovereignty through TEDs/TEAs and liberate tribal sovereign potential.

Figure 2. *Liberating Sovereign Potential Capacity Building Framework*



Conclusion

Mann (1997) provides a thorough timeline for C&A education, from its origins to the progress the C&A Tribes made up to 1982. In addition to the timeline, Mann provides stories through her great-grandmother's perspective and concludes with Mann's own perspective of

Cheyenne and Arapaho education. Mann played a significant role in the establishment of the higher education scholarship committee and created a footprint that CADOE still follows today. Mann's work includes how federal Indian policy affected Cheyenne and Arapaho education from the allotment and assimilation period to the self-determination period and how these policies impacted C&A families and students. Federal Indian policy still has a lasting effect on the C&A Tribes. However, there is minimal literature that combines TEDs/TEAs, Indigenous women's educational leadership, and Indigenous Education. While there is significant literature about Indian Education, federal Indian policy, and higher education leadership, there is a lack of literature about how TEDs and TEAs are asserting sovereignty and building capacity, specifically from the perspective of Indigenous women in leadership. The literature only provides a basic understanding of TEDs and TEAs and how they operate.

The C&A Tribes are fortunate to have significant literature that provides an educational history from Mann (1997). This study is a continuation of Mann's work, not only showing the C&A Education Department's progress in recent decades, but the storied experiences of women who provided leadership and guidance over that time.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter provides an overview of how this study utilized Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008) in the research design. This chapter also includes the research purpose and research questions, a description of the research site, and parameters for participant selection, as well as the data collection process, data management and analysis, and how including relevant frameworks guided coding. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how data will be represented through narrative, along with ethical considerations.

Research Purpose and Questions

Purpose of Study

This study explored the leadership stories and experiences of Cheyenne and Arapaho female educational leaders in TED/TEA contexts through Indigenous storywork. The study focused on six Cheyenne and Arapaho female educational leaders and how they have built capacity and asserted educational sovereignty through program and department building.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the stories of female leaders working in and with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education that demonstrate building capacity?

RQ2. What are the stories of female leaders working in and with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education that demonstrate asserting sovereignty?

Methodology: Indigenous Storywork

Indigenous storywork is a decolonial methodology that centers stories of Indigenous people, elders, and communities that centers their lived experiences. Archibald (Archibald et al.,

2019) coined the term “Indigenous storywork” as a way to describe how researchers and educators can engage with Indigenous stories that produce meaningful research. According to Archibald (2008), “The particular Indigenous teachings that I use are both principles and practices that are interwoven throughout the book” (p. 1). Archibald (et al., 2019) explains how “Indigenous lived experience stories are also gaining prominence within methodology to provide a deeper and more authentic perspective of Indigenous knowledge systems, colonial impact, and sovereignty approaches” (p. 18). This approach was chosen as it was well aligned with our Cheyenne and Arapaho worldview. This also aligned well with the Indigenous Feminism and Liberating Sovereign Potential frameworks, which are both conceptual frameworks informing my research centering Indigenous stories and experiences as discussed in the previous chapter.

While Archibald’s (Archibald, 2008; Archibald et al., 2019) notion of storywork is the primary methodology guiding this study, this approach also works as a form of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is used in different disciplines including psychology, law, medicine, and education. Jerome Bruner (1986) is one of the first contributors who established narrative inquiry as a formidable form of methodology in social science research. Narrative is defined as a form of knowledge that tells two sides of the phenomenon (McQuilan, 2000). Narrative is a human endeavor that is basic to human life and a strategy of human expression. The story is a significant part of narrative that is explained as a detailed organization of events arranged in a structure, although not in chronological order. In other words, story can also mean lived experience.

Indigenous storywork is a critical methodology that challenges western theory, research and knowledge and asserts cultural teachings. As mentioned in the first chapter, Archibald (2008) “... use[s] the term ‘teachings’ to mean cultural values, beliefs, lessons, and

understandings that are passed from generation to generation” (p. 1). Indigenous storywork encourages Indigenous researchers to not only explore our own worldviews, but to assert our own ontological and epistemological constructs in our work (Archibald et al., 2019). Smith (as cited in Archibald et al., 2019) states:

Decolonization...does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (p. 6)

It needs to be stated that decolonization does not have one definition, guideline, or practice in place. By utilizing Indigenous storywork as a methodology it allows Indigenous communities to voice, listen to, and understand our stories with respect, reverence, reciprocity, and responsibility (Archibald et al., 2019). As an Indigenous researcher, this allows me to assert what is important to my family, community, and nation, and to push back against colonial educational systems. As I discuss later in this chapter, this also allowed me to incorporate more of my own experiences than I originally anticipated.

Regarding standards and quality related to storywork methodology, Indigenous storywork is an Indigenous methodology that is centered on the following seven principles (Archibald, 2008, as cited in Archibald et al., 2019):

1. Respect-the principles of respect for cultural knowledge embedded in the stories and respect for the people who owned or shared stories as an ethical guide.
2. Responsibility-for any mistakes contained in the research because those who share their knowledge did so with great care and often said they spoke the truth as they knew it.

3. Reverence-is shown through prayer and songs, prayer or song helps create a meeting place for the heart, mind, body, and spirit, silence creates a respectful space for reverence.
4. Reciprocity-giving back to the people with whom you are working with and sharing learning with others.
5. Holism-refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical realms to form a whole healthy person.
6. Interrelatedness-an interrelationship between the story, storytelling, and listener is another critical principle of storywork.
7. Synergy-the power created during the storytelling session seemed inter-relational as it moved among the storyteller and the story listeners in the storytelling situation. (p. 26-36)

These seven principles allow “an ethical guide for the researcher to work with Indigenous people, their Indigenous knowledges, and stories” (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 1). Regarding this framework, Archibald (2008) writes, “One educational goal I had for my doctoral work was to find a way to fully examine Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing within academe” (p. 5). This framework is used in Indigenous conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical contexts that provide an ethical guide for engaging in Indigenous research. Another important principle of Indigenous storywork is “An interrelationship between the story, storytelling, and listener” (Archibald, 2008, p. 32).

Indigenous storywork primarily drives the methodology of this research. As Indigenous people, stories fill our lives every day from family, friends, and co-workers. Respect,

responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy are principles and teachings that have been taught to Indigenous children by family, friends, elders, and community members since birth. Not only do Indigenous learn the 7 principles provided by Archibald, but they are also responsible for practicing and preserving for the next generation.

Research Design

Research Site and Contexts

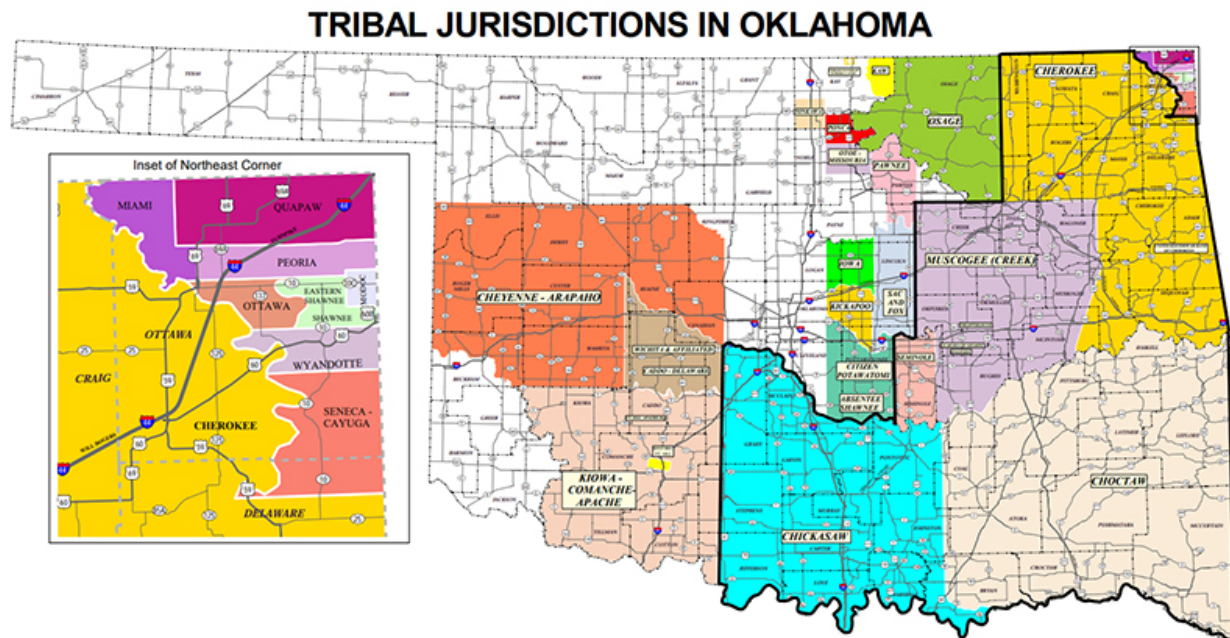
The Cheyenne and Arapaho service area in Oklahoma included former reservation territories but is now a patchwork of federal trust land owned by the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes. Many tribes in Oklahoma were displaced, relocated, and forcibly moved to reservations by the federal government. In addition to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, 38 other tribes are now located throughout the state of Oklahoma, although most are no longer in possession of their land.

The Arapaho claimed their original homeland in Colorado (Trenholm, 1970); however, on October 21, 1867, a peace council signed the Medicine Lodge Treaty, which allocated reservation territory for the C&A Tribes north of the Kiowa and Comanche reservation (Steere, 2009), which is now known as western Oklahoma. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes (two separate tribes) formed an alliance years ago (the exact date is unknown). They were later placed on a reservation and renamed and recognized as one tribe by the federal government.

The former reservation territory of the C&A people now includes nine counties and more than 125 square miles. The area is now referred to as the C&A service area and includes 13 tribal communities in western rural Oklahoma. Former C&A TED leaders are from various tribal communities in the service area. As a researcher, I was respectful to the tribal community and

offered to travel to them for interviews. As you will see in the next chapter, traveling across these areas is woven into the storytelling methodology for this study.

Figure 3. *Tribal Jurisdictions in Oklahoma*



Note. This figure is a map of the 39 tribal jurisdictions in Oklahoma.

Participant Selection

The selection of the participants in this study was focused on Cheyenne and Arapaho female educational leaders who have worked in or around CADOE. Most importantly, each participant is a citizen of the C&A Tribes and identifies as a woman. The recruitment process involved inviting two elders that I knew who had extensive knowledge of C&A educational contexts. They then identified four others who I asked to take part in the study by email. I then followed up with a phone call to answer or clarify any questions, if needed. For further context, I have existing relationships with these individuals as an insider to our tribal communities. The professional working relationship I have built throughout the years allowed me to ask former

female education leaders about other potential leaders who have work with CADOE in the past.

For this study, I found six women who met some of the following criteria below (See Table 3.1):

- Has held the title of Coordinator, Director, or Executive Director for the Department of Education,
- Has held the title of higher education director/coordinator for the department of education,
- Has been recognized as an educational leader by tribal officials and/or community leaders,
- Has worked for the department of education in a leadership capacity, and
- Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal citizen.

It was not required to meet all the bullet points listed above. Participants were required to be a Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal citizen and could meet one of the other criteria listed, not all.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

Name	Community within C&A Service Area	Education	Experience (Years)	Participant Information
Do'onah'e (Prayer Cloth Woman) AKA: Dr. Henrietta Mann or Henri)	Hammon	PhD	40	Participant has spent most of her career in higher education teaching Native American Studies.
Teresa Dorsett	Geary	2-Master's degrees	38+	Participant has spent most of her career in tribal leadership/management and in tribal education.
Francine Williams	El Reno	N/A	23+	Participant has spent most of her career in tribal education specifically with the Johnson O'Malley Program.

Dara Franklin	El Reno	Associate's degree	35+	Participant has spent most of her career as an Indian Education Director for a public school system.
Wanda Whiteman	Clinton	Master's degree	40	Participant has spent all of her career in tribal education specifically working with the BIA and Higher Education Scholarship Program.
Dr. Natalie Youngbull	El Reno	PhD	15+	Participant has spent her career working with tribal colleges and universities as well as a professor at a higher education institution.

At the beginning of the study, I only knew two participants that I wanted to ask to participate initially. During the interview process, the first two participants mentioned the other participants by name or a date, program, or experience that directed me to ask the other participants. This was an example of snowball sampling defined by Noy (2007) as “when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (p. 330). The snowball sampling process is as follows: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet other informants, and so on (Noy, 2007). As a reminder, each participant has worked in or around CADOE and has experience working with Cheyenne and Arapaho students in our tribal communities in the past, so the working and personal relationship overlap and intersect.

Each participant has contributed to building capacity and asserting sovereignty for C&A education in some capacity in the past 40+ years and are familiar with the other participants. All participants were given an opportunity to review the excerpts included in my dissertation to ensure they were comfortable with how they are represented (Archibald et al., 2019). They were

also provided with the opportunity to clarify or add to the stories and experiences they shared with the researcher.

Data Collection: Interviews and Artifact Collection

This study utilized a semi-structured open-ended interview approach with a blend of two individual interviews each, following suggested question stems from Bhattacharya (2017).

Artifacts were also collected. The initial round of interviews began with individual semi-structured interviews lasting 1-2 hours each. Since we all have existing relationships, the interviews were very informal and casual. The second round of interviews (and follow-ups) also included clarification of dates, names, and places with each participant. Once the interviews were transcribed and sent to each participant, they were able to answer or clarify details in the interviews by email. Also, because I know the participants and often see them at meetings, community events, basketball games, or sometimes in their homes, they had access to me to clarify stories shared in their interviews or to add because they remembered another story.

While not every interview was the same, the consensus was “I want to make sure I give you the right answer.” The researcher made it clear at the beginning of each interview that it was just a “visit” between two colleagues, family members, or friends. With the inclusion of the informed consent form and interview guide provided to the participants before the interview began, it made the process more formal. I believe this gave a few participants hesitation before answering or thinking they had to answer correctly, which I responded with, “There is no right answer, these are your stories.” A few of the interviews began with short and timid responses, but once they began sharing stories the participants became more at ease.

After the completion of interviews with each participant, data were transcribed and coded as described below. As categories and themes were identified, a follow-up was conducted to either ask clarifying questions or for the participant to review the data. The interviews were recorded by audiotape and transcribed, and I utilized a journal to keep track of notes and analytic memos. I offered anonymity to each participant, so their identity, stories, and experiences were protected; however, each participant opted to utilize their names in the findings as opposed to using a pseudonym. This decision was made after explaining what a pseudonym is and the purpose of utilizing them in research. I also double checked with them prior to final publication with clear communication that these stories will be open access on the internet, and they again affirmed their preference to be named.

Although I had access to personnel files that included resumes, job descriptions, and training/workshop completion certificates, these files were only accessed if permission was granted by the participant. Documents and artifacts from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), CADOE, or the Office of Records Management were collected and reviewed. The documents and artifacts that were reviewed were 638 contracts, memorandums, grant award letters, grant narratives, tribal resolutions, event flyers, meeting minutes, etc., and they were analyzed together with the interviews. Because of my position within CADOE as the Executive Director, many documents were readily available, such as submitted grants, contracts signed by program officials, meeting minutes, event flyers, and records management documents. These documents were collected if a participant prompted me to look further into a grant, story, or event. For example, if participants mentioned an interaction with tribal council, I could retrieve the minutes

of those sessions. Or if a participant mentioned a specific grant, the documents were readily available within the department.

Data Management and Analysis

Bhattacharya (2017) defines data management as “the process through which the researcher manages a large volume of data. This also includes chunking small analytic units from the large body of raw data (Bhattacharya, 2017). Due to the length of each interview, along with the follow up information, and the collection of documents, the amount of data was initially overwhelming for the researcher. However, the data analysis process began immediately to make sense of the data, and analysis continued throughout the writing process, as well.

Data analysis required a process that allowed deeper insight into how I integrated the conceptual frameworks, literature, and the research purpose and questions (Bhattacharya, 2017). To analyze the data, inductive analysis began after following the approach listed below:

1. Familiarize yourself with the data
2. Chunk data into manageable units of analysis (coding)
3. Cluster some of the analytical units into categories
4. Look across and within categories to identify patterns
5. Write reflexively about pattern identifications and connections you are making to other parts of your research
6. Discuss your findings with your participants. (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 150-151)

Inductive analysis allowed me to code, categorize, and find emerging themes that provided organizational structure to visualize the data (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Coding

The coding and categorizing process was a balance of a priori categories aligned with the conceptual frameworks, as well as staying open to emerging concepts in the data using in vivo style coding that used their quotes verbatim (Saldana, 2016). Overall, the analyses process was informed by the research purpose and questions, along with the following concepts from frameworks that were outlined in Chapter Two: Indigenous Feminisms (Barker, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shanley, 1984; St. Denis, 2007) and *Liberating Sovereign Potential* (RedCorn, 2020).

Table 2. *A Priori Keywords and Concepts*

Framework	Concepts Driving Category and Theme
	Development over 2-3 Rounds of Coding
Liberating Sovereign Potential (RedCorn, 2020)	Building Capacity
	Asserting Sovereignty
Indigenous Feminisms Barker, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shanley, 1984; St. Denis, 2007)	Tribal Sovereignty
	Seeks to Empower Communities
	Empowerment of Women
	Sexism

Table 3.2 shows the a priori concepts that guided the analysis process. Here are some examples of some specific in vivo codes that were coded according to some of the concepts shown in Table 3.2.:

Building Capacity:

- “There are no funds to pay you, and you have to work without pay. But I’m writing a grant and as soon as it gets approved, I would get back pay.”
- “They want to be partners, they want to work with us, it’s just really establishing that relationship and understanding. Kind of building a bridge and just talking about what the problems are and how we can help.”
- “Having that relationship with the schools helps our kids.”

Empowerment of Women:

- “I guess learning about gender and equality were really a learning experience for me. I was never conscious or made conscious of that as a child growing up.”
- “Men and women directors are different, all have their own way empowering employees, they see things differently in education.”
- “Teaching kids about who they are and where they come from, to be proud of their history as Cheyenne and Arapaho people.”

These codes and their affiliated stories are aligned with the key concepts identified in the two conceptual frameworks along with the research questions.

For the open coding, I used multiple rounds of open style in vivo coding (Saldana, 2016). Because I wanted to keep their stories in full context, I often found it necessary to code in larger chunks, and I worked to break them up as a narrator as I continued to write up their stories in the findings. Examples of open style in vivo coding when participants mentioned Riverside Indian School or Concho in their stories, this was grouped as a boarding school theme that emerged. Also, more examples of in vivo coding are when participants shared stories that mentioned partnerships, relationships, resources, or cultural teachings. Additionally, the act of writing and

reviewing was an additional act of analysis as the act of writing became a form of analytic memoing (Bhattacharya, 2017; Saldana, 2016). In this sense I flirted with the data (Kim, 2016), which I describe in more detail below, which allowed me to find depth in the stories as I went back and forth through the editing process with my dissertation chair, and while I also continued to get feedback from participants through member checking (Bhattacharya, 2017). Additionally, an example of the open coding that occurred led to an additional section in the findings on how their experiences with boarding schools and public schools in their upbringing informed their understanding of leadership.

Flirting with the Data and Narrative Meaning

When using narrative techniques, Kim (2016) states that “we will learn to ‘flirt’ with different methods of narrative data analysis and interpretation to find narrative meanings in the collected data” (p. 186). After the data collection is complete and the researcher is overwhelmed, or what some might call finding saturation in the data, that is understood as a good thing because it is better to have more data as opposed to having less (Kim, 2016). I felt I accomplished this, and my insider relationships allowed me to understand the contexts and make connections in ways that outsiders might not (more on this below).

According to Kim (2016), flirting or flirtation is not a bad term and should not have a negative connotation. Flirtation is defined as undoing our commitment to what we already know and questioning its legitimacy. Flirtation is considered an unconscious form of skepticism. This asks the researcher to engage in flirtation with ideas so you can get to know them in different ways. According to Phillips (as cited in Kim, 2016), flirtation:

- Exploits the idea of surprise and curiosity.

- Creates a space where aims or ends can be worked out.
- Makes times for less familiar possibilities; and
- It is a way of playing with new ideas without letting these new ideas be influenced by our wishes. (p. 187).

By flirting with data, it allowed me to be surprised or curious because I did not know what would emerge from the data. What is also exciting about flirting with data is finding stories that “we haven’t necessarily bargained for” (Kim, 2016, p. 188). An example of finding a story that the researcher did not bargain for was the connection all the participants had to Concho. All during different years and capacities during their lives. Also, understanding the participants as children and how they became the educational leaders in our communities was not anticipated. As you will see in my findings section, and as described in the next section, I engaged in this type of flirtation with the data as I developed the narratives found in the next chapter.

Data Representation: Narrative Smoothing and Narrative Coda

According to Kim (2016), narrative smoothing “can be used to mask our subjective interpretation as explanation, and to present a ‘good’ story that is not necessarily a ‘faithful’ account” (p. 192). Narrative smoothing can be used to make a story coherent; however, there is a risk of making omissions to a story based on the researcher’s assumptions. The researcher must be able to create a story that is coherent and be able to provide the necessary context.

Researchers cannot tell a story that is different from the original experience as told by the participant. Lastly, failing to share a faithful account of the stories shared is an ethical issue (Kim, 2016).

In the findings chapter, I included personal vignettes at the beginning and end of each section, and sometimes in the middle when a personal reflection felt necessary to offer more context or depth. These sections are entirely in italics. These are a combination of my reflexive journaling, but also a reflection on some of my everyday work experiences and not necessarily a specific and factual story. I used this to help create context for the reader, deepen the narratives, and help the reader transition among the topics. This is also what prompted the creative use of space on the page to offer more of a story telling aesthetic that highlights compelling quotes or in vivo codes and for emphasis on very important words and phrases, I also use italics in more conservative ways (as opposed to my own fully italicized reflections) to emphasis key phrases. This narrative smoothing and coda approach is also what brought out my use of the phrase, *...all good roads lead to concho*, which you will see emerge more clearly in the next chapter.

“[T]he word coda came from Latin, *cauda*, which means tail” (Kim, 2016, p. 228). Kim connects coda from the musical word to narrative research by bringing the music or research to an end. Kim asserts, “The coda in narrative analysis, thus, is a link between the past world of the story to the present world of the storytelling” (p. 229). Since narrative coda is considered the end of the story Kim suggests leaving the readers with an “oomph” that reverberates long after the story is over. I aimed to blend this approach into my final two chapters. As you will see in my conclusions, I become more personal and intentional about my audience being primarily up and coming Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders. According to Kim,

... a coda is a must-have element that can bring the research a notch up, as the researcher evaluates what the researched stories all might mean, while finding ways to transfigure the story’s commonplace to illuminate the larger society, and bringing

the readers together with the now of the research phenomenon we have set out to explore. Rather than providing the solution to our research problem, the coda can be presented as an invitation to genuine dialogue among the readers for problem finding, because narrative inquiry, as far as I am concerned, is ‘deeply about plight, about the road rather than about the inn to which is leads.’ (p. 229)

The researcher must be able to tell what comes after the story (Kim, 2016), and these stories should be represented with themes, categories, and direct quotes, as well as be accompanied by visuals, images, and artifacts that will be interwoven throughout the stories. As you will see in the next chapter, I intentionally worked to abide by these standards.

An Emerging Understanding of the Self: The Inclusion of Personal Anecdotes in the Findings

Extending on what I explain above related to *narrative smoothing*, the data analysis process and journaling of analytic memos led to a deeper journey of personal self-awareness and discovery as a member of the community and as the Executive Director for CADOE. This allowed me to lean into the narrative aesthetic included in the findings, by including personal reflections as a student, community member, and executive director. This narrative technique assisted with transitions between the participants’ stories but also allowed me to offer some transparency regarding my subjectivities. While my own stories were not the original focus of the study, I quickly realized how my stories and experiences were intertwined with those of my participants. This includes my own reflections around Dr. Mann’s (1997) work as she reflected on her own journey along with her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Narrative inquiry allowed me to include that narrative aesthetic to deepen the findings, and the result was a

heightened visibility and transparency of myself in the data that is more than I originally anticipated.

Ethics

It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the participants are comfortable, at ease, and understand what the study is about. This study was submitted for approval by Kansas State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB process was very meticulous and required the researcher to readjust the initial proposal. Initially, the researcher was required to complete the IRB Researchers and personnel on IRB protocols and Responsible Conduct of Research courses to meet the requirements for an approved IRB. Due to the possibility of some of the participants being elders, it was recommended to complete the Research with Older Adults course with the CITI Program. Once the IRB was approved this allowed the researcher to begin recruiting participants for the study.

It was not anticipated that most of the participants were going to be elders, but the Research with Older Adults course completion was helpful to the researcher and study. Five of the six participants are an elder or older adult according to the CITI Program. To protect the identity of the participants I asked if they would like to use a pseudonym at the beginning of each interview. As mentioned previously, after explaining what a pseudonym is and its intention to protect their identity, participants were ok with using their real names. Dr. Henrietta Mann preferred to be called by her Cheyenne name, Prayer Cloth Woman (English translation). All the data collected was stored on a secure and locked desktop computer.

Indigenous qualitative researchers recognize the need to contribute to their communities. It is important to share the stories, voices, and experiences of Indigenous female educational

leaders who often lack visibility. Researchers also need to consider who they are writing for. Kim (2016) shares, “Writing only for the readers while neglecting the participants would be taking the risks of being unethical because we end up ‘using’ the participants as objects in research” (p. 232). It is necessary to remember the writing is intended for multiple audiences (Kim, 2016), but being true to Indigenous methodologies (Smith, 2019), I tried to create a narrative that spoke directly to a C&A audience but was also aesthetically accessible by multiple audiences.

Summary

This Indigenous storywork study explored the leadership experiences of six C&A female educational leaders in an effort to deepen our understanding of gendered experiences and CADOE capacity building and contribute to the broader field of emerging literature around TEDs and TEAs. As RedCorn (2020) states, “Leaders mobilizing this definition of capacity building will ultimately enhance their nation’s influence in the education of their citizens” (p. 5). What we know about the history of Indian education is that federal policy has been detrimental to Native communities. In response, Tribal Nations are seeking control. Through capacity building and asserting sovereign TEDs and TEAs have the power to not only influence the education of their tribal citizens, but to regulate the education of their tribal citizens. Through storywork methods using semi-structured interviews and a blend of open and a priori coding, followed by narrative flirtation and smoothing, I hope to share the stories of these women so we can document their contributions to capacity building in Cheyenne and Arapaho education.

Chapter 4: Findings

All Good Roads Lead to Concho: Historic Hallways in Cheyenne and Arapaho Education

From a young age the most important lessons were provided to me by my elders, aunts, uncles, parents, community members...in the form of story and observation. This storywork is centered on our former reservation territory land base which has evolved from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian Agency, the Concho Agency, the Cheyenne and Arapaho School, and the Concho Indian School (see Figure 4.1), to what it is now the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal headquarters.

Figure 4. *Concho School, Concho Agency*



Note. This figure is a picture of the entrance to the Concho School and Concho Agency.

As I began my interviews, I was eager to hear stories from one of our most cherished elders and leaders in Cheyenne and Arapaho education, Prayer Cloth Woman, or as others know her, Dr. Henrietta Mann, or as I know her, Henri.

My parents met here at Concho at the boarding school. They married and my mother went to Hammon where my dad lived; it's not really Hammon per se, its east of Hammon. It was a community of some Cheyennes that lived on their allotments in houses, different from an Indian camp. There was no Hammon school for him to go to but there was a...*Concho Industrial Training School* and they both came here, and I am told that my father ran away from Concho when he was first brought here and walked back to Hammon. It was late one day and my grandfather, I don't know if he really welcomed him home or not, but the next day, he brought the horses in, he harnessed them up, hooked them up to the wagon and he brought my dad back to Concho. He said, 'You're going to have to do this, we live in a different time, and you are going to have to learn how they talk...how they think.' So, my father did. He had to return ... *here to Concho*.

Aside from Prayer Cloth Woman, one of our most impactful woman leaders in Cheyenne and Arapaho education was my mother, Dara, who I was also eager to sit down and visit with. Her journey in education also began with an emphasis on Concho...

My mother and father [my grandparents – Violet and Virgil, Sr.] worked at Concho Indian School; she worked in the dorm and my dad worked in parks and recreation. I had to go to the boy's dorm in the mornings to get my hair fixed by my mom. She would be checking out socks, t-shirts, stuff like that in the main office.

My mom continued discussing her memories of my grandma Violet:

I always remember seeing my mom as a dorm mother taking care of the boys. There were sponsors that took care of the Concho kids and one of the boys had got some Christmas presents. He came in to see my mom and said I got some stuff that I don't want. My mom said, 'Well we can find somebody that needs it.' He left and came back and brought me a big teddy bear. He said this is for you. I was really excited and thanked him. *I always wished I could have gone to school there.* They had a recreation room, a band room, and had activities for the students to do. We didn't have that where I went to school.

Both Prayer Cloth Woman and Dara did not realize at the time how Concho would be a connection from where their journeys as children began to the journeys in their careers, both centered on Cheyenne and Arapaho education. As I listened to the stories of my participants, I started to realize ... *All good roads begin at Concho.*

Now, I'm reflecting on our recent Head Start graduation in mid-May 2025. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education administer three Head Start centers in our service area. I've been privileged to offer the commencement speech at our Concho Head Start graduation for the last eight years. I love to remind the young graduates and families every year: "I was a Concho Head Start Graduate... (see Figure 4.2) long ago. This is where I got my start in education."

I was recently in Clinton, Oklahoma, about an hour down the road from Concho but still in the Cheyenne and Arapaho service area, attending one of our other Head Start graduations. The graduation began with a procession of the graduates, continuing students, and teachers, led by a song from a Cheyenne and Arapaho drum group. After the procession the center supervisor

Figure 5. *Me as a Concho Head Start Student and as the Executive Director of CADOE*



Note. Concho Head Start student photo from personal collection. Concho Head Start Graduation photo from 2023, photo taken by Adriel Clements.

welcomed everyone and acknowledged tribal elder, Patrick Spottedwolf to give a prayer. It is common at our gatherings to open with a prayer. Cheyenne and Arapaho people begin and end everything with a prayer. Next, the center supervisor welcomed another tribal elder, Cheyenne Chief Gordon Yellowman, Sr., to provide a message to the families and children. This is common at our gatherings, to open up a formal gathering with good words from an elder. Chief Yellowman began telling a story about his son, Everett Yellowman, and how he remembered when he attended Head Start in El Reno, Oklahoma at an old Indian Methodist Church, about seven miles down the road from Concho. He shared how his son was selected to be the first Brave at the Head Start and how Stephanie Franklin, my sister, was selected as the Princess. He shared a memory about Everett and Stephanie being in a parade in El Reno,

describing how they both rode on the top of a car waving to the crowd in their regalia. He concluded with a message about how he will always remember how Head Start played an integral part in the beginning of his son's education.

Once the graduation ceremony was complete and everyone was getting in line to eat. I went to see Gordon to shake his hand and thank him for providing our families and children with good words. While shaking his hand I shared: "I did not know Everett and Stephanie attended Head Start together." He responded, "Yes, your mother was the Head Start director at the time; in fact, she was the first Head Start director and that was in 1981." He also shared he remembered when there used to be a Head Start in Kingfisher and El Reno, but after a few years they combined and began sharing a location in Concho, the current location of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education – in the same building of the former boarding school. Shortly after the two locations merged, Concho Head Start opened and began operation. I thanked him for sharing these stories and information with me. Although Gordon was not aware of the study I am conducting for my dissertation, I wondered why he chose to share that story with me. I believe he told me this story for a reason. Unknowingly, his story connects to the work I am doing and is a reminder of how important storywork is.

Head Start, yes of course. As I mentioned before, I attended Concho Head Start as a child (see Figure 4.3). Some of my earliest memories are of being a student at Concho Head Start. We attended classes in the former boarding school buildings that included the gym and former offices of that boarding school. This was during the late 80s, so the buildings were still in good condition, usable for other programs. The playground was sandwiched between the gym and the old dormitories, and I can still remember swinging on the swing set, students playing and

Figure 6. *Concho Head Start Class Photo*



Note. Photo of my class taken outside of the Concho Head Start.

laughing. Miss Sophie was the head cook, and I recall her serving us food and I would tell my mother, “Miss Sophie makes the best beans!” After two years, I graduated from Head Start in a baby blue cap and gown. From there I would attend Darlington Public School from kindergarten to 8th grade, which was conveniently located five miles down the road.

The former boarding school classrooms, offices, gym, and dormitories were soon after used for various programs. The “Concho gym” as it was referred to was used as a Bingo Hall, which was very popular with my mom, aunties, and uncles. While our parents would play bingo, we would be down the hallway in the game room either playing hide and seek, video games, or foosball. They even had a concession stand where we would excitedly buy candy, nachos, and pickles. We looked forward to it. The former boarding school gym has also been utilized as a

place for bringing our people together as a community, for benefit dances, graduation dances, funerals, tribal council meetings, and sometimes for open gym. Although the boarding school closed, the tribes were able to use the space for tribal families to gather, celebrate, mourn, or to get business done. And I've been there to witness it all.

Now I sit in an office that was once a classroom or office in this building, the former boarding school that our elders attended – even a participant in this study. But also, the place of my early childhood education and Head Start graduation. I can still smell Miss Sophie's beans and smell the sweat during open gym when playing out our rez ball dreams. I can also still hear my Aunties and Uncles cracking up at bingo while we played down the hall...

“Aaaaaayyyyyyyyye”

Now, the sign at the front of the building reads “Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education”. My office sits across the yard from the gym – still sitting there, unused, needing renovations. But my office is renovated. Fresh. Modern. On the wall outside my door, it reads: “Executive Director”

Now, I sit in this building responsible for administering the educational programs of our tribes or, as some folks call it, a tribal education department or agency – a TED or TEA. My office is a place where employees, students, or grandparents come for help, support, to laugh, or share a story on any given day. And when I have time to reflect on the significance of the work, I get to do in a space that was originally created to “civilize” our people, I remember we're still here. As I consider the stories shared by my participants as well as those shared by my own family and my family's roles in education, I wish I had asked my grandparents more questions

about Concho or had these conversations sooner. I wish I realized earlier the impact my mother had on education, not just for my siblings and I, but other Indian students at Darlington. I also find myself thinking about all the other stories about Concho that I have not heard yet or asked about. But what I find most interesting is that all the stories shared in this study begin with Concho. Whether it's about Head Start, boarding school, a bingo hall, or a tribal education department, all those systems overlap with origins in Concho ... and all good roads lead back to Concho.

Setting the Context: Boarding Schools vs. Public Schools and Cheyenne and Arapaho Educational Choices

From what we have been told by our families we know that boarding schools were bad, devastating, and detrimental as many of us in Indian education have constantly seen the pictures of students getting their hair cut and dressed in Euro-American clothes, being forbidden from speaking their language, the atrocities brought forward by the *Meriam Report*, etc. These stories are often focused on the late 1800s' to 1920s' version of boarding schools. However, in this study, four out of the six participants mentioned their experiences at boarding schools in the latter part of the 1900s, and they had an overall positive experience. During this era these schools may not have been perfect, but they were no longer run by missionary groups, churches, or military leaders. Overall, these four participants described their experiences with words such as happiness, enjoyment, and love. They also discussed why *they chose to attend a boarding school* as opposed to a public school.

Teresa shared her experience:

I went to Concho Boarding School in my 6th grade year, my 8th grade year, and half of my 9th grade year I went to Riverside Indian School. It was probably a good thing for my mom and dad because most of my brothers and sisters and I went there. It was probably a hard time in their life as far as taking care of all these kids... I have six brothers and sisters. *My boarding school experience was good.*”

Teresa wasn't the only one with these sentiments; several of the participants told stories of their positive experiences attending boarding school, particularly in contrast with public school experiences. Implied through most of their stories, it appears to be a desire to be in the presence of other Native children—peers, friends, and family. This came through as an emergent topic of discussion among all the participants, even though it was not an area of focus in the interview questions. Therefore, I begin this chapter by sharing this context because this is the background they provided for me. Here I synthesize stories related to the experiences of the participants in boarding schools, particularly in contrast with their experiences in public schools, around the topics of school choice, their happiness and enjoyment, and the opportunities they encountered.

Participants frequently made it clear that they shared with their parents that they were unhappy in public school settings and preferred boarding school settings surrounded by Native peers. For example, Francine described her unhappiness in a Utah public school. She also had siblings who attended Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Oklahoma. As she explained, “I just wasn't happy, I ended up coming back to Oklahoma and asked my mom if I could go to Riverside when I was in the 10th grade. I graduated in 1981 and that's where I met my husband.”

Additionally, Wanda told me a story about attending Riverside Indian School, as well. She shared:

I went to school with my cousin and she's the one that encouraged me. I wasn't going to school, wasn't doing anything, just being on my own running around. She wrote to me at my sister's house, and said, '*Come to Riverside, it's good down here.*' I was accepted and she (social worker) took me down there to Riverside.

Like the stories of Francine and Wanda, Dara shared how she found out about Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma and wanted to go to school there. She explained, "I had a dear friend who visited Concho with her family and told me she was going to go to school at Fort Sill Indian School. So, I got it in my mind that I wanted to go to school there too." Dara then shared how she "started bothering her parents because there wasn't anything in El Reno." Dara had never been away from home until she went to Fort Sill, but she stuck it out and finished high school there. She made sure to emphasize how she "really enjoyed it," her time and experience at Fort Sill. Overall, Teresa, Francine, Wanda, and Dara shared similar sentiments and experiences about *making the choice* to attend a boarding school for various reasons, but there was also a notion of the level of happiness and connectedness to peers that factored into their decisions.

Regarding their happiness while attending boarding school it was all very clear about how happy they felt and how they enjoyed their experience, but most importantly, they *wanted* to be there. Teresa shared that her boarding school experience was good. Francine left Utah where her mother and mother's new husband lived because she was unhappy in the public schools. She reflected on the choice to attend Riverside and explained it was an overall positive experience and where she met her husband. Wanda's story was also like the other participants when she

explained, “I really loved it; I loved boarding school. That was an enjoyable time. I made friends that have lasted forever, longtime friendships.” They contrasted these experiences with their public-school experiences, which were not positive.

Participants also explained how opportunities provided to them at boarding schools were worth the choice to transfer. Wanda admired the upper classmen at Hammon High School (public school) who were able to take the typewriter class and made it a goal of hers to take the class once she got older. She recalled, “I could hear them typewriters going. I would look in and they would all be typing and I would think oh I can’t wait to get to high school so I can type. That was always my dream.”

Although Wanda didn’t graduate from Hammon Public School, she was given the opportunity to learn how to type at Riverside Barding School, just a one-hour commute south of Concho. She remembered how this opportunity at Riverside led to some long-term positive outcomes. She described:

I had to learn how to type on an old manual typewriter and I was just throwing that cartridge or whatever it was called back then, typing and throwing it back (makes the motion with her hands). I can’t believe I knew how to type on that, and I got good at it. I guess my typing teacher took notice of me at Riverside. He said there’s a job opening in the superintendent’s office and they want someone that can type good, he said I recommended you for it. So, I did the application in the superintendent’s office, and they hired me. I would go after school and work in the superintendent’s office until 5pm.

All participants in this study shared a story that connected them to a boarding school or a boarding school experience, and the stories shared both connected them to boarding schools with

a personal student experience or through a family member. Specific connections to Riverside Indian School were shared by four of the six participants. Both Wanda Whiteman and Francine Williams graduated from Riverside, Dara's father and brother graduated from Riverside and her mother retired from there, and Teresa attended Riverside for half of her freshman year in high school. There are several reasons why American Indian and Alaska Native students choose to attend boarding schools, but the participants emphasized a negative public-school experience as a reason to transfer to a boarding school.

Sharing about her public-school experience, Prayer Cloth Woman described how she was excited to attend school, and she started at an early age. Her parents had to get permission from the Indian agent to attend school in Hammon – a public school in Hammon that is a two-hour drive west from Concho. She remembers being age five or so and the Indian agent said, “*Go ahead and enroll her she's so young she's going to get tired and when she gets tired you can pull her back out of school.*” Prayer Cloth Woman was happy to be at school and referred to it as the happiest place she could have gone. It was new and different, where she learned a new language. She remembered,

I think I learned at that time that I was being assimilated. Education has always been important to us; it always will be. It facilitates a whole process of learning, which is good, but can never be or remain as it is in preparing every child in this land to be like everybody else.

As described by the participants, racism, prejudice, and discrimination have always been present in the public schools in western rural Oklahoma, reflecting a system that has been created and upheld for generations. Wanda stated her opposition to attending public school, and her

preference for boarding schools because, “It was all Indians even though some of them looked white, they were Indians. They were Indians on the inside you could tell they were brought up in Indian community and Indian way.” Boarding schools made the participants feel as if they belonged and were comfortable being themselves. Being surrounded by people who look or think like them had a positive impact on their overall experience.

Dara described her public-school experience:

We lived in Concho but went to school in El Reno. I went to school there until I was in junior high and from there, *there was nothing for us to do, for us Indian kids*. There wasn’t anything in El Reno, there was no basketball, there was no softball. We were all always involved in some kind of sport, dad always had softball teams, basketball teams, we had a family softball team. *There was nothing for us to do.*”

Like my mom, Wanda lived in Hammon most of her life until she was 16 years old. She shared,

I went to school there and I enjoyed the school but looking back on it I know there was discrimination there between the non-Indians and Cheyenne and Arapaho, I experienced a lot of that, ...I could see that, *I could see it was racial even though they really tried to be our friends.*”

Wanda did well in school when she was at Hammon and participated in speech. She competed in speech contests and would win a superior mark; it did not bother her to speak in public. But sadly, after her mother passed away, she expressed how she lost her courage and strength and withdrew from school activities.

Not all experiences in public education are the same, however. Darlington stands out as something entirely different. One participant expressed how her public-school experience at Darlington Public Schools was positive and supportive overall. As mentioned before, Darlington is a high-density⁶ school because the AI/AN enrollment is well over 25% and is located less than five miles away from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal headquarters where our tribal government offices, flagship casino, and a convenience store is found. Tribal and casino employees voluntarily send their kids to Darlington and most often live out of district. Darlington seems to have a unique responsiveness compared to other public schools, according to the participants. I should also note that in current contexts as Executive Director of CADOE, in my day-to-day work Darlington remains one of our strongest partner districts and my mother, Dara, who is a participant in this study is the Indian Education Director.

Another participant, Natalie, who is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Oklahoma, with a PhD in Educational Policy Studies & Practice, attended Darlington and described her fondness:

I started at Darlington K-8. I do feel like I really loved education. *I remember being supported or just having a good experience with Darlington.* The teachers, the kindergarten teacher I remember how supportive she was. For the most part the teachers throughout I had very positive experiences with. Mr. Meriwether, Gina (now Principal), and Mr. Martin, I think, were also very influential, *all of them being non-Native people too. You could tell they genuinely cared for us and didn't try to put us in a box, didn't try to make us feel like we were othered.*

⁶ As defined by the National Indian Education Study (Rampey et al., 2021).

During my visit with Natalie, she clearly wanted to give credit to Mr. Meriwether, a lifelong non-Native mentor. Natalie shared, “Mr. Meriwether, I just have like such a special place in my heart for him because you know he was there since we were in kindergarten. He gave me my first job out of high school working for the Boys and Girls Club.” I also worked for the Darlington Boys & Girls Club during my breaks from college when I was an undergraduate student at Haskell. I can also attest to the positive impact that Mr. Meriwether had on our experiences at Darlington, as well as the impact he had on my family. He was the administrator responsible for hiring my mother, Dara, first as a teacher aide and then as the Indian Education Director. He has worked for Darlington for the past 30 plus years. Natalie explained this unique relationship with Darlington and with Mr. Meriweather:

He always checked in and asked how I was doing to the point where when I moved away, anytime I came back home I would make time to go to Darlington to go visit. I knew I could see him there; I knew he was always going to be there and so you know just to check, see him, you know reconnect because I just always felt like he cared. He still does to this day. And then Gina’s [current Principal] an extension of him so it’s not him alone but Gina too right.

Although Mr. Meriwether has retired, Gina is still there. She is the reason why we send our kids, nieces, and nephews to school at Darlington because we know they’re going to be taken care of. Natalie shared,

You know we didn’t have that opportunity of having Native teachers growing up and again even though they’re non-Native, to me, *the way they treated us* was like how we would be treated by our family or by community members.

While the research questions did not focus specifically on boarding school and public-school educational experiences, the stories shared happened during the interview process organically. I felt it was important to share their stories and experiences because it provides the backdrop of their personal understanding of educational systems – as these are the foundations for what drove them into their own versions of education and leadership as Cheyenne and Arapaho women. There is a clear connection between these early experiences and how they show up to do the work and ultimately serve Cheyenne and Arapaho students and families.

Listening to their stories made me think about my own experiences in the public school system. I remember at one time thinking I was the only one who experienced... prejudice, discrimination, and racism. When I was in high school a classmate found out I was Arapaho. One day while everyone was changing classes, he said pointing at me, “She’s from the tribe ‘Slapaho’. Everyone laughed. In that moment I was embarrassed, and I regret not standing up for myself. But these types of experiences caused me to be ashamed of who I was and to hide.

Although I was raised to be proud of who I was and where I came from, I wasn’t strong enough. It took me having to pack my bags, leaving my community, and traveling north to Lawrence, Kansas to attend Haskell Indian Nations University, which coincidentally enough, also has a boarding school origin. It wasn’t until I got to Haskell where I felt safe enough to be myself. I felt like I was with family and felt like I belonged. Most importantly I was no longer hiding who I was and where I came from. As a result, I was able to thrive as a student. It was the first time I was in an institution where the administrators, professors, and staff looked like me. My experience at Haskell was positive and I was able to graduate with an associate and bachelor’s degree. I was motivated, empowered, and ready to make a positive impact on my

community. When it was time to leave Haskell I... I once again packed my bags, left Lawrence and traveled south back home to Concho because to begin my professional career as a young woman serving the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, because

... All good roads lead back to Concho.

Gendered Experiences of Cheyenne and Arapaho Women Educational Leaders

Long before I went to Haskell, my grandpa was an Arapaho Chief and growing up I watched him prepare for Native American Church meetings, ceremonies, sweats, benefit dances, and prayer services with our people. I understood that it was his role as a Chief, and he was highly respected. But I also saw my grandma prepare him for every duty and responsibility he had as a Chief. She wasn't always in front, sometimes next to him. But she was always preparing giveaways, meals, and our family to support him. Because of my grandma I knew women had an important role in our way of life. Because of that understanding I thought my role as a woman in mainstream society would be viewed as the same. But from my vantage point, now, I see a difference between what I've experienced in traditions and ceremonies, and institutional leadership nuances at places of business. Or rather, gender seems to unfold differently where we "work", As opposed to what I experience, or learn, through ceremony.

After graduating from Haskell, I immediately made my way back home to El Reno. I knew I wanted to work with my people at Concho in some capacity. I was motivated and ready to make a positive impact. It took me almost a year to find a permanent position. Because I had a degree I was hired in managerial positions. I was also young and a woman, I encountered sexism and

ageism almost immediately. “She’s too young, she doesn’t have enough experience, or she doesn’t know what she’s doing.” These are just some of the assumptions that were made about me. Thankfully, I had mentors and family members who were proud of me and ready to give me an opportunity to learn...and that I did. Almost 20 years later, I’m still here...leading and learning as we try to take care of our people. After graduating from Haskell, I’m still so happy to have found my way back to Concho.

While I began my early career work upon returning, I was a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. I wanted to be an athletic director at a university, an early dream of mine. I remember telling my advisor about my career aspirations and she told me, “The reality of you wanting to be an AD at a PWI may never happen. Not because you’re not qualified but because you’re an Indigenous woman. That’s like two negatives, you’re Indigenous and a woman. They barely hire white women in those systems and most times they are only administrative assistants. I remember that conversation as if it happened yesterday and I’m grateful for her honesty. This conversation not only had an impact on my career trajectory, but my research trajectory, as well. I’m grateful that I had the opportunity to pursue my doctorate at Kansas State University, which is mostly online. This allows me to attend my doc classes at a university, from my desk in Concho.

Cheyenne and Arapaho Cultural Gender Dynamics

According to our way of life, women hold the most important place in Cheyenne and Arapaho cultures. They have the ability to give life, and care for it. As participants explained, for Cheyenne and Arapaho people, women and men each have important roles in their communities, societies, and families, and each role is not in competition with one another. Women are often

told they are the backbones of their families, and if it were not for assimilation, boarding schools, and mainstream society, C&A women would have never been taught they were less than or not good enough.

Prayer Cloth Woman shared when reflecting on modern conversations about gender and equality,

I guess learning about gender and equality were really a [new] learning experience for me. I was never conscious or made conscious of that as a child growing up Cheyenne.

And probably reinforced, if you look at our very sacred ways of how we continue to pray, that women have a very vital role in that."

Prayer Cloth Woman recalled that she knew she was loved as a female child. She knew that her male brothers and male cousins were loved as well. She shared, "We knew that there's males, females, and there's those that have their own lifestyle, powerful beings." She shared that the powerful beings, which are also known as two-spirited beings, are accepted. She stated, "They were just a part of the makeup of our communities; they were accepted as they were for the knowledge and the role they could play in our respective nations." As a Cheyenne woman, Prayer Cloth Woman was taught that everyone, regardless of gender, played a vital role in the community.

Natalie reflected on the teachings from her grandma:

Going back to my grandma's right, I didn't have any grandpas. I don't remember growing up really with any grandpas on my mom's side or on my dad's side. *But my grandmas were very, very much involved in my life, they were very much a part of who I was.*

Natalie remembered one of the most beautiful and strongest women that she has ever known, her grandma, Lucille. Natalie shared, “I don’t remember ever once being told by any male family members to know my place, I had to be married or questioning why I don’t have a family or any of that stuff.” She also remembered “never being put in a box”, how her father, brothers, and uncles never used language that would put her in her place as a woman. They were also very supportive of her academic journey and career. She shared, “I remember my grandma mentioning that you know Cheyenne traditions, *it’s not like the man is in front of the woman, it’s always beside*. The women always have a place in our ceremonies, and it’s not just about the men.” She also explained how she had male mentors who have come along with her in her journey, but never being told she should be doing something different or living her life a certain way. Again, she reflected on how her grandma taught her how to carry herself.

When I think of how I carry myself it goes back, honestly to my grandma and my grandmas. *The love they showed was a certain kind of tough love. You know they weren’t soft*. Because my mom was raised by an Arapaho Chief, as I shared earlier, her perspective is always informed by her cultural teachings.

Dara also shared,

I don’t try to be anybody, but I’ve taken on a leadership role, ceremonial wise. As a woman I’ve come up against men that don’t always agree with me. But I never step in front of them and stay strong with the woman that I am.

As my mom reflected on seeing strong younger women taking on leadership roles, she explained how, “some of our, men, sometimes they don’t like it.” But again, my mom has always known from her dad that you don’t get ahead of men. Mom explained”,

‘My dad always told me you don’t talk in front of people unless you’ve been in ceremonies or you’re in the military, that’s been our way. That’s one of our traditional customs when they come to you and they need you to talk, they give you that time.’

So that’s kind of the part or the role that I have, ceremonial wise.

“But she also reminded me, while our leaders are typically men, we have women that are just as strong, and they’ve taken on leadership positions.”

Considering these cultural foundations, our people are fortunate that we still have many of our traditional practices and ways of life intact. However, we now have a modern tribal government that employs over 500+ people, that isn’t the exact same context as our cultural systems. They overlap, but they are different. In our government, C&A women continue to seek and use education as a tool to enhance their careers and therefore are given opportunities to lead programs and/or departments. Therefore, C&A women make up many of the leadership core who are responsible for making decisions that impact the experience, services, and opportunities of students and families they serve. In these roles, they must also have the technical skillset to create a budget, address personnel issues, seek and apply for grants, and administer programs and departments. This means that they are responsible for building capacity and asserting sovereignty, and those cultural foundations are still present while code switching across different systems and institutions.

Cheyenne and Arapaho Feminism in Leadership: “Taking Care of our People”

During Wanda’s career, she saw that women leaders are more understanding of life situations. She recalled how female leaders operated with an emphasis on taking care of our students, and how they are more likely to foster personal relationships in doing so. She shared,

“The males are more formal or business, not really caring I guess you would say. So, there’s that difference and they’re colder.” She went on to say, “female directors listen and they’re more compassionate”. She recalled how men and women directors navigated situations, for example, if a student got in trouble, or needed help, a male director would probably say, “well, that’s their fault they did it”, but a woman director, would say, “well, we’re going to help them.” Wanda also asserted, “I always notice all the men felt like they were superior to women. There was that attitude and like women didn’t know as much or weren’t as smart as men.” But she joked in that good Indian humor way, “Of course, we know we’re very smart (laughs), probably smarter than them. Ayyyyye.”

In Natalie’s experience, she sees women having this innate sense of helping others. Reflecting on the power of women to give birth and provide life, she explained, “You know, I think it could go back to these life-giving abilities ... those stronger connections ...it’s just innate in us because we feel that connection from our own bodies.” When Natalie considers the broader notion of leadership, she has seen that women are more willing to consider others before themselves. Natalie shared,

Decision making from the male perspective [comes] from this space of ‘well we’ve got to make this decision quick’, we’ve got to move this work forward’, or ‘we’ve got to keep this going that kind of thing’. Where I think that a women’s perspective of taking the time to fully account for all the different factors in certain situations before moving forward because it’s more about you knowing the impact on others, maybe like us being considered right. I think that women are more informed about *their home, the family, the community*.

She further asserted that women are more closely connected to the youth and possibly the elders because women are typically givers and they're the ones taking care of others. Natalie shared that in leadership women are more accounting for others, more than from the male perspective.

Teresa's career spans 35-38 years, from what she can remember. She asserted, "I think every job I've had has been in a leadership positions." She believed as a woman leader and having worked in every capacity at the tribe, she's always felt valued. In most spaces, Teresa recalled being told, "Teresa help us. What do you think Teresa? Or we don't know how to do this without you." She also shared,

This has always been my pet peeve. When you come up with an idea, you say it, and then a guy across the table says it and they're like oh that's a great idea! And you're like, I just said that (laughs)!

She said those experiences happened occasionally throughout her career.

Teresa also shared that currently most of our tribal leadership is female. Although she feels like we're valued, she still feels like there's still some old school mentality and sexism prevalent. An example of her experiences in leadership is where she has been talked down to by a particular person, a male colleague. But she believes as women working in leadership, we need to address these types of issues directly because it makes for a better work culture for women. Teresa asserted that it is our responsibility as women to speak up and to respectfully disagree. She stated, "*We have to keep speaking up.*"

Francine has also had an extensive career in the Department of Education and has worked with several directors/executive directors, male and female. She recalled an experience working

with a male supervisor who she said he seemed like he was paranoid, based on the feeling she got from him. She shared,

I started hearing reports about him making the directors cry, mostly women. One time he called me in his office and told me to shut the door. I said, “What do you want to talk about? He said he heard something about me or something I did from another co-worker. I responded and asked if he wanted me to get the co-worker who said that. Then he goes on to say, “No, that’s just what I heard.”

Francine remembers telling her supervisor, *“I’m the most loyal employee in education and I will never lie.”* Even now she does not remember what was said about her but felt if she were a male he would not have approached her in that way.

When Wanda began working for the tribe, she noticed a lot of men thought that women shouldn’t be in high, authoritative positions. During that time, it was the men that would tell women what to do. She noticed those things and shared, “A lot of men just wanted men to be directors.” She said the men in charge didn’t want to see women working in leadership positions, *so, if there was a man applying for a job, he would usually get it over the woman.* Wanda said, “It’s just how their mindset was.”

The participant stories are an example that Indigenous women are not exempt from sexism because they are working for their tribal nations. In this study the participants also hesitated saying sexism or sexual harassment or were quick to dismiss the terms. However, their experiences show Indigenous female leaders are not exempt from sexism under Indigenous male leadership.

As Teresa reflected on her educational and leadership journey, she shared, “The degrees help you get those positions.” She felt like she had good ideas, was able to process things, and found solutions to problems. Although Teresa has an extensive career in leadership she stated, “I don’t really consider myself a leader.” She said there is a difference between a manager and leader, but I don’t know the difference and she feels like she’s somewhere in between. Teresa stated, “I don’t think I try to lead, I think I try to do the right thing.” She believes part of being a leader is to solve problems and make things better. As she reflected, she laughed and asserted, “I could never be Governor.” She has run for Governor (of C&A) one time because she wanted to fix things but quickly realized she hates politics. Teresa currently serves as the Chief of Staff and is content in that position because she can help fix things and loves it. She shared, “*And maybe the leadership comes while you’re managing and trying to do the right thing. Maybe you automatically inherit the leader.*”

Francine reflected on her experience in public school and remembered one person in particular, Barbara Cobert. Francine said, “Barbara was my Indian Education person in Anadarko elementary school.” She remembered how Barbara taught the kids how to do the Lord’s Prayer in sign language. Francine shared, “We had a little assembly, and we did the Lord’s Prayer. We all had our regalia on.” Francine continued, “When I see the girls doing it and your daughter, now it’s just carrying on. *We’re carrying on our culture.*” She shared a long time ago we grew up learning how to dance, dancing, learning how to bead, little things like that. Now, as a leader for the JOM Program Francine offers cultural classes for her students and families. She teaches students how to bead earrings, make gourds for gourd dancing, sing Arapaho hymns, and how to bead moccasins. Francine has remained committed to carrying on our culture.

My mom's first position at Darlington was a teacher aide. Several years later she was selected to be the Indian Education Director but was always an advocate for the Native American students at Darlington. She said, *"I took care of the kids and made sure they were comfortable."* Her belief and mindset that she wanted to take care of the kids meant finding ways to meet their needs. For example, she noticed students were having an issue with transportation and as a result there were a lot of tardies and absences. Dara looked at ways to help them get to school and help their parents so their children could be better students. After discussing the issue with administration, the school provided her with a van to pick up students so they could get to school on time.

Another issue my mom noticed was students coming to school hungry. One of her goals was to make sure students weren't coming to school hungry. She shared reasons why students might come to school hungry. "Sometimes students would be late, or we don't know what happened on the weekend. Maybe the family had a sweat, maybe they had a funeral, or maybe there were out of town." She would relay that kind of information to teachers and administration. She shared, *"It was important to share about our cultural teachings or what was going on with the student so they wouldn't be penalized."* I felt it was important information for the teachers and administration to know and understand." She would always speak with her boss to find solutions to issues she was noticing. After she asked her boss how to start a breakfast program, he found one, and it started soon after.

My mom would always advocate for students and work on any problems that would arise. Throughout the years enrollment flourished, and she noticed an increase in C&A students. As the school has grown every class is now full and they even have a waiting list. She shared that

most of the students are her family; even if they aren't, she calls them family. She shared, "I even have family from Watonga who send their kids to school here." My mom's career as an Indian Education Director has spanned 35+ years and her impact has not gone unnoticed. In 2021 Darlington began building a new library and media art center, and on August 15, 2023, they named the new building, the Dara Franklin Library & Fine Arts Center. My mom goes to work every day and sits inside an office in a building with her name on it, all because she believed in taking care of students and making sure, they were comfortable.

How Cheyenne and Arapaho women understand and assert sovereignty is different and unique. The stories and experiences shared by the participants are examples of ways to uphold tribal sovereignty according to their perspective. How a leader understands leadership, how we carry on our culture, or creating a handbook are ways to uphold and assert tribal sovereignty. Every participant in this study has lived, studied, attended school or worked at some point in their lives outside of western rural Oklahoma. Since then, they have chosen to return or remain in one of our tribal communities. It is important to the participants in this study to remain connected to our tribal communities but to also empower our tribal communities. The stories shared by the women in this study exemplify what it means to empower communities and how it is not limited to one experience, title, or job.

Prayer Cloth Woman shared, "I just love the fact that I was born into the Cheyenne Nation and that we are allied as Arapaho and Cheyenne. Because of our great respect for individuals and peoples we have a capacity to dream and to fail, but to be who we are." She added it is important to be accepted for the entire time the Arapahoes and Cheyennes walk this earth. She believes that this teaching is something our non-native brothers and sisters need to

learn as well. Prayer Cloth Woman is proud of her community and in return empowers the community.

My mom has served as the chairperson for the Oklahoma Indian Nations Powwow Committee for the past 20 years and shared her perspective on doing community work. “The organization has built something for the people to enjoy themselves. As chairperson I want to make sure the people are taken care of because that’s what matters most.” Dara also shared, “I like to see our people happy, fed, and taken care of.” Of course, these teachings have been instilled in her from her folks. She comes from a Chief family and has always been taught, “*We take care of our people.*” Furthermore, she believes to live that kind of life we must look after our people. If somebody needs help, we help them. “Whatever you can do, you know if it’s food, if it’s gas money, something... *we help*”, she shared. Like Prayer Cloth Woman, my mom believed our people are the best. She said, “Our people are so humble, and other tribes don’t understand our people, *we give.*” She shared that’s our way; we feed them and give away. And she knows it is an honor to do that. When people call upon you, you take care of your people. For her, coming from a chief family, she knows it’s important to carry those lessons on. Lastly, she shared her grandfather was a chief, her father was a chief, and her uncle was a chief. Now as a community leader, she is carrying on what her family has taught her for generations.

Summary

This study utilized the conceptual framework of Indigenous feminism with the following tenets: seeks to empower communities, seeks to empower women, upholds tribal sovereignty, and sexism. This Indigenous feminism conceptual framework does not need to label Indigenous women as feminists for it to be useful. Every experience shared in this study by the participants

is a community-based leadership perspective that centers responsibility to family, community, and to the people.

Internal Restructuring Allows for Capacity Building with External Relationships Across Systems

As I interviewed the participants, I couldn't help but reflect on the importance of relationships during my time as the Executive Director of CADOE. For us, a key component to building capacity for CADOE has been relationship building. Relationships are mutually beneficial to not only school districts and education departments, but to the students and families we serve. Both within our own systems and tribal government (internal), as well as outside of our system with school districts, state departments of education, federal agencies, institutions of higher education, tribal college and universities, and various other external relationships. These are built over time through understanding one another's perspectives – being good listeners, and good relatives.

But if I'm being honest, one important component that tends to prompt relationship building with area schools and draws people to the table is the current tribal government's support for educational programming with gaming revenue funding, signing off on grants to fund projects, and more. But there also needs to be trusting relationships for stewarding the vision of the department leader. Another important factor over recent years has been the consistency of the tribal government's leadership. In the new constitutional system, which I discuss in more detail below, when a new Governor and Lt. Governor was elected, they began to avoid deviating from the current structure and plan in place for our department. Consistency started to settle in,

because in the early 2000s our administration had a reputation of inconsistency through political turnover. In turn, this inconsistency wasn't helpful in relationship building.

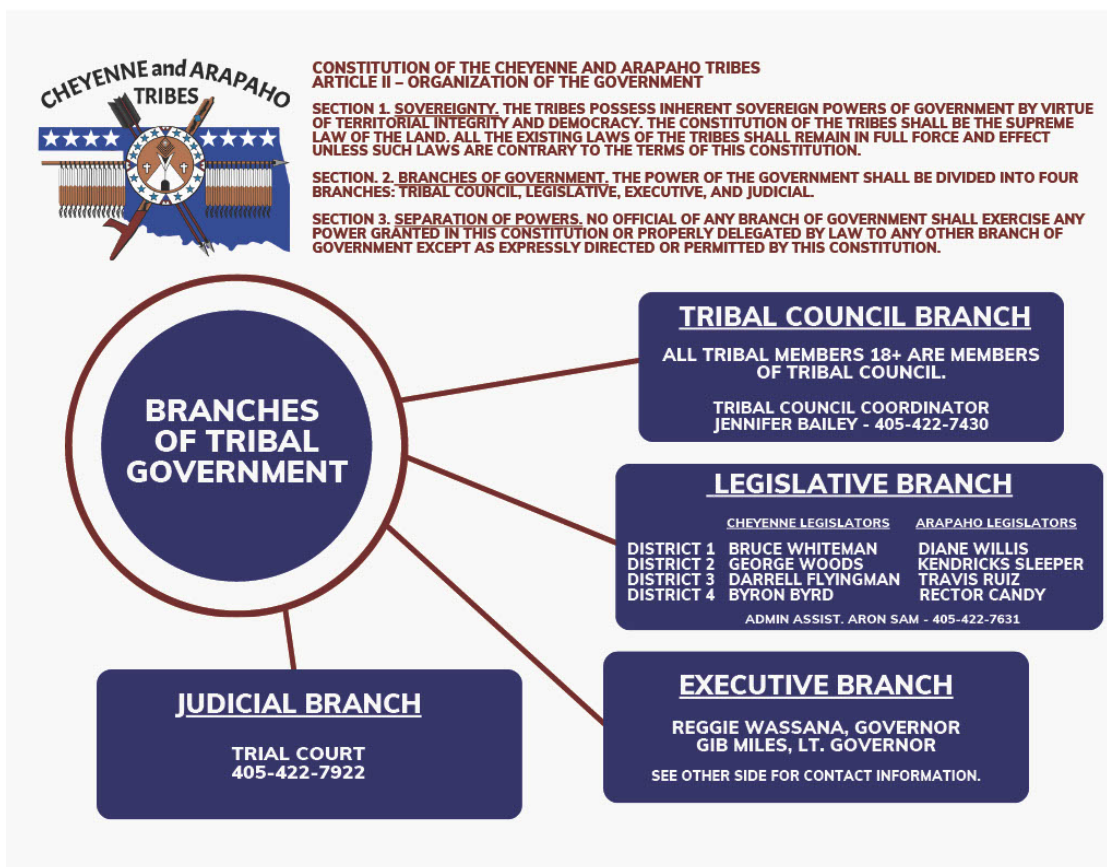
In August of 2015 I was asked to serve as the Interim Executive Director for the Department of Education. By mid-September I began my tenure, and I immediately scheduled in-person meetings with every superintendent with all 13 LEAs in our tribal service area. The purpose was to introduce myself as Executive Director of CADOE, introduce my staff, and provide a list of services our department offers to families and students. We were intentionally trying to create personal relationships and open access to mutually beneficial resources and programming. Initially, we agreed to travel to them because they would not travel to see us. While our offices were in Concho, the LEAs were spread out in western rural Oklahoma. This meant jumping in my "Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes" mini-van and travelling the roads of western Oklahoma anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours from Concho to meet with LEA administrators. Throughout the month of September 2015, our team would load into the van, leave Concho, presentations and handouts in tow, and hit the road with a goal of establishing positive working relationships with the school districts serving our students. While we were hopeful that our intentions would be well received, not all of them were. Some superintendents refused to meet with us. The superintendents that were good enough to meet with us and listen to us, however, told us ... "They're always firing someone at the tribe." And while that was hard to hear, to be fair, they were right.

There was a time when the tribe was in constant turmoil due to a lack of consistency in the tribal government. But, true to the struggles of rural education, over the years there have also been many changes in the school district's leadership teams (i.e., superintendents,

principals, assistant superintendents, assistant principals, and federal program people) due to retirement or relocating jobs to a different school. Fortunately, our tribal government started to show consistency by employing the same leadership team. The assumption by the school districts was that the tribe was inconsistent and in turmoil... but now, I'm still here. We're still here. Still working to build those relationships.

In the findings, two of the participants, Francine and Dara, mentioned the business committee, which was the governing body of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes. The Business Committee consisted of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and members who represented each district in the tribal service area. When the Business Committee was the governing body, the Chairman was the authority or had the “power” of the tribes and that led to inconsistency and instability. In April of 2007, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes passed a new constitution that included an Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branch of government for the tribes (see Figure 4.4). This was the first time that we would have a Governor and Lt. Governor. The purpose of the new constitution was to bring a balance of power amongst the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of tribal government. The legislative branch of the tribal government is comprised of the legislature, made up of four Cheyenne districts and four Arapaho districts, and each district has one Cheyenne legislator and one Arapaho legislator, for a total of eight legislators. They serve four-year staggered terms. The business committee member positions were replaced as “legislators” who would continue to represent the districts in the tribal service area. The legislature convenes in Concho for twelve regular sessions of up to two consecutive days beginning on the second Saturday of each month.

Figure 7. *Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Branches of Tribal Government*



Note. Organizational chart for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Branches of Tribal Government, created by Breanna Faris, Higher Education Scholarship Program Director.

During the business committee era, Francine recalled,

Before how the tribe worked ... the business committee members were the ones who had the power, you know, before we got the Governor and Lt. Governor. That was new having a Lt. Governor and Governor of the tribes... before it was, you know, we didn't have a constitution at that time either.

As participants described, prior to the adoption of the new constitution the business committee had substantial authority. Dara shared,

Back then the business committee looked over the applications, and they hired me. He called me and told me you got hired and so I talked to my dad. He goes, ‘Well, you know whenever they hire you by resolution that’s the law by our tribe. So, I know you’re going to be ok, represent your people and take care of your people.’

During that time the business committee was able to hire and fire employees at will. In the new structure, there is more separation between the legislative and executive functions.

Why does a tribal government structure matter when building relationships or partnerships? During a time of inconsistency and instability internally, externally non-Native people took notice. They would either read about the ongoing court battles or at times see our tribes on the news because of ongoing fighting. Local, state, and federal governments did not want to partner with the “tribes” because we were not stable. Schools did not want to partner with us not just because of our tribal government, but we also had employees who did not have the background, experience, or skillset to understand Indian education. And they did not want to partner with an entity that was not stable. The Governor is responsible for signing off on every grant, contract, and expenditure and it is imperative to have stability and consistency from the tribal government to prove that we can be trusted.

The tribal government is the formal structure that supports every relationship, partnership, or grant that the Department of Education enters. If a tribal government is stable and consistent, the departments and programs are as well. This allows departments, programs, and leadership to build capacity and assert sovereignty. Most importantly, the services provided by the tribes are effective and efficient. As a result, building relationships across internal and external systems allowed for a growth in capacity for the Department of Education.

During Teresa's tenure as Executive Director she believed in building relationships. She shared, "*I think the biggest thing was the relationships with the community and the schools. It wasn't easy.*" She elaborated further,

We did have relationships with the schools, some better than the others, ... it was just really reaching out to them, saying *how we can help, we're here*, we really want to help with the education of our students. *Is there anything we can help with?*

Under Teresa's leadership and her belief in building relationships, the department began applying for grants that would allow capacity building with LEAs. In the spring of 2012, the education department received an Oklahoma Education Association (OEA)⁷ grant to hold community conversations as an attempt to improve educational outcomes. The department chose to work with El Reno Public Schools to establish a good working relationship. Teresa described,

We had meetings with El Reno Public Schools and their teachers and talked about Indian education. That was the most enlightening process I've ever been in. We got to hear what our white teachers thought about Concho, *I was like, really, you think that?* One of the teachers said, '*I just thought it was the responsibility of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes to educate their kids.*' And *this is a teacher at El Reno Public Schools; that was eye opening.*

As Teresa continued to explain, there was more to it. She elaborated: "Then most of them (the teachers at El Reno) expressed *they always wanted to know more about the tribes but felt*

⁷ The Oklahoma Education Association has long been considered the voice of education in Oklahoma. It was founded in 1889 as the Oklahoma Teachers Association.

like we were off limits ... and didn't think they were welcome." Yet, Teresa saw an opportunity to build relationships, as she explained:

That really did result in me thinking that *they want to be partners, they want to work with us, it's just really establishing that relationship and understanding. Kind of building a bridge and just talking about what the problems are and how we can help.*

Teresa also shared how impactful the OEA grant was for El Reno Public Schools. She shared, "That was the most enlightening process I've ever been in. We actually got to hear what our white teachers thought about Concho." The OEA grant and Teresa's success in building new relationships led to increased capacities because white teachers felt welcome to share their thoughts and feelings and to ask Cheyenne and Arapaho educators questions. Teresa remembered an administrator made a statement about how they thought educating Indian kids was the responsibility of the Tribes. As she explained, she also shared that the administrator was very nice, just uninformed. As a result, the teachers felt welcome to visit the Department of Education, expressed that they wanted a better relationship with the tribe, and even shared how they would like to attend a powwow. The OEA grant provided a bridge to a relationship and better understanding of each other's roles in educating Indian students.

Francine also recalled working with El Reno Public Schools, and how it was an eye-opening experience for her. She shared, "When my daughter was going to school a teacher asked her, *do y'all still live in teepees?* And I was like, ok, *what year is this?* But a lot of people don't know." Francine then elaborated on Teresa's tenure as director, and explained:

When Teresa was our director, she was trying to establish a relationship with the schools and do a professional development with El Reno because it's just down the street. The

teachers, some of them were acceptable to it and some of them didn't want to be there.

You could tell they were told to be there.

Francine also conveyed the progress that the relationship building produced, explaining how teachers in El Reno now “have a different outlook now about Native parents and children, and why they do the things they do,” and how “having that relationship with the schools helps our kids.” Francine was not only able to affirm Teresa’s approach to building relationships and capacities, but she was also able to participate in building the relationship – and continues that work today as the JOM Coordinator. Sometimes all it takes is open dialogue, but the participants’ stories suggest to LEAs and TEAs that having ongoing dialogue is essential to the relationship building process, whether it makes them uncomfortable or not. More than that, they emphasize that building and maintaining positive working relationships between an LEAs and TEAs is also motivated by the residual benefits to our students and families.

Teresa went on to explain how relationship building started translating into additional resources and capacity building through collaborative grant pursuits. She explained, “Of course, capacity building as far as grants, we worked on writing the first STEP (State Tribal Education Partnership)⁸ grant partnership with the Chickasaws.” While Teresa did not remember the reason or the specific nuances of driving the grant, she knew they would have a better chance at getting the grant if there was partnership. The STEP grant was significant because the Department of Education was able to work closely with the state department on building capacity. The STEP Grant abstract for October 1, 2012—September 30, 2015, reads as follows:

⁸ The STEP grant is a discretionary grant awarded by the Office of Indian Education (OIE). The purpose of this program is to promote increased collaboration between tribal education agencies (TEAs) and the State Educational Agencies (SEAs) and the local education agencies (LEAs) that serve students from the affected tribes.

The goal of this project is to establish a Tribal Education Agency (TEA) consortium between the Chickasaw Nation Division of Education and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Department of Education to transfer some ESEA state administered functions for formula grant programs in an effort to increase TEAs role in the education of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and improve academic achievement of AI/AN students through a partnership with the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The TEA consortium will partner with the State Education Agency (SEA) to provide administrative assistance of Title I, Part A, Title II, Part A and 21st Century Community Learning Center ESEA formula grant programs within the TEA consortium's tribal boundaries.

Furthermore, the grant created the first partnership with a formal agreement between the tribes and the LEAs with a memorandum of understanding (MOU). This grant would establish the first of several discretionary grants CADOE would receive.

The LEAs that agreed to the first partnership were El Reno Public Schools, Canton Public Schools, and Darlington Public Schools. There were several reasons why El Reno, Canton, and Darlington were chosen to participate, such as unsatisfactory test scores or a school having high free and reduced lunch percentage. It is important to share because of the OEA grant and establishing a positive working relationship with El Reno, they were eager to be a partner in the STEP grant. Defying the underachieving AI/AN deficit stereotypes for student success indicators nationwide, one of the main reasons Darlington was selected to participate in this grant was because 94% of their students identify as AI/AN and have high test scores. This grant would utilize Darlington as a successful school model for educating their AI/AN students. It

would be the first grant to build capacity working across multiple systems, (i.e., the TEA, LEA, and SEA).

Teresa also shared her experience working with the Oklahoma Council for Indian Education (OCIE)⁹, an organization that could help build capacity for the department. OCIE, often referred to as “OC (pronounced oh-see)”, is a grassroots Native led organization that advocates for Native American students in Oklahoma. The organization was first established in 1982 with a conference and soon after a board was created. Since its inception OCIE has successfully created educational excellence and equal opportunity for Native American students across the state. They still have their annual conference every December, created the Oklahoma Indian Student Honor Society, award multiple scholarships every year, and host the annual Legislative Day and the annual OCIE Challenge Bowl. The board nominates and elects a President, President-Elect, Past-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Parliamentarian. Additionally, there are board positions that are representative of regions in Oklahoma, such as Northwest Representative, Northeast Representative, Southeast Representative, Southwest Representative, At-Large Representative, and a Student Representative. OCIE does an excellent job bringing together Native American educators from K-12, higher education, and TED/TEAs to address issues in Indian education annually.

Teresa served as President of OCIE during her tenure as Executive Director for two years, and professional networking and relationship building during that time also built capacities for CADOE. During that time, she remembers having a conversation with Quinton Roman Nose,

⁹ The mission of the Oklahoma Council for Indian Education (OCIE) is to advocate within the state of Oklahoma for Native American students.

another former director of CADOE and current Executive Director of TEDNA, who proposed we host an annual legislative day. The purpose of the day was for Indian educators across Oklahoma to convene at the capitol to meet with their senators and representatives to discuss policy and initiatives impacting Indian education. She explained, “While I was President, we hosted the first Legislative Day at the capitol, with Quinton’s encouragement.”

Partnerships and relationships are the most important component of shaping the educational experiences of students. As Teresa shared, it is not easy to build a relationship with a school district where there is a lack of understanding between both the TEA and LEA. However, Teresa’s story is important because the relationship with El Reno began with an OEA grant that provided professional development. Teresa was unclear when the grant was awarded but she remembers it was around 2010, during her last tenure as Executive Director. Most importantly, it helped show us how to build relationships with LEAs into positive working relationships, and the role they would play in future opportunities. In other words, new professional relationships translated into enhanced capacities to influence the education of our kids in public schools.

While discussing capacity building with Natalie, Cheyenne and Arapaho scholar and now a professor, she has been a student receiving services from the Department of Education but now works alongside the department continuing to build capacities in new and exciting ways. She shared,

What I can say I’ve seen in terms of the sheer growth of the departments and the programs underneath it, I mean our kids are so well taken care of. And it’s great, it’s so wonderful and it’s very needed because we’re still not seeing the representation from within the school systems.

She also believed “partnerships and relationships are crucial to the success of our tribal students more than ever before.”

I agree. It got me thinking about how my grandparents and mom have always told me, “Be good to people.” When I started working my mom would elaborate and say there’s going to be people you don’t like and people who aren’t going to like you, but you have to be good to people. Although I didn’t understand the importance of this message at the time, this teaching would be the foundation of every relationship and partnership I have built internally and externally as an administrator. Being good to people leads to better relationships. Throughout there were several superintendents and assistant principals who were a text or a phone call away. We were in constant communication.

It is not easy sitting in a public-school administrator’s office being told, “We don’t need your help” and not taking those comments personally. As a leader and administrator, remaining professional is a struggle, especially knowing the Native students and families’ needs are not being met. Yet, through the stories of these participants – these women Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders – there was a keen sense of patience and persistence, with an understanding that the relationship was a key to something bigger. Bigger capacities, bigger impacts for our Cheyenne and Arapaho families and students. It also helps build a network across systems, so we can always care for them. This network also helps our students and families always know their way back to Concho.

Growing Resources, Programs, and Services leads to Growing Capacities

Growing up and benefiting from the resources, programs, and services that the tribes offered to me as a student, I never took them for granted, but I also never appreciated them the

way I should have. The college visits, the basketball tournaments, new backpacks and school supplies, the basketball shoes, and summer enrichment opportunities. I have grown up knowing Teresa, Quinton, Francine, Wanda, and others who worked for the education department, but I never realized all the hard work they put into building the programs, resources, and services so students like me who desperately needed their services could benefit from their capacity building over the years...and still do. Not only am I a beneficiary of these resources, programs, and services, I am also now a leader who has inherited these systems and is responsible for continuing the good work they started.

My role as an executive director is to continue to build upon the systems created by past leaders like Teresa, Wanda, Francine, and Quinton. Part of my role is to ask: how do we improve the overall quality of life for our tribal members? For the Cheyenne and Arapaho people one of the ways we do this is by providing resources, programs, and services. The best way to describe our standard is, “how can we get the help (e.g., school clothing vouchers, higher education scholarships, backpacks, tutoring and mentoring services, school supplies) into the hands of our people?” My responsibility as Executive Director is to remain committed to growing resources, programs, and services that I have inherited.

My mom, Dara, has been, serving Indian children for the past 30 years. She was the first Head Start director during a time when an education “department” did not exist in our tribal structure, but the services did. Now she oversees Title VI and Indian education for Darlington Public Schools and values the services and opportunities provided by the Department of Education. She proudly shared,

The education department is one of the top departments in the state. We have programs that reach out to 13 different areas (LEAs) ...they're all being taken care of from childcare to Head Start, to grade school to high school, college. I mean they are meeting our needs.

Credit can be attributed to the increasing amounts of fund being committed to educational programs for our tribes.

One of the reasons Dara appreciates the Department of Education is because the partnership between the TEA and LEA never existed prior to her becoming the Indian Education Director. Prior to the partnership, an example of the type of cultural enrichment she provided was when she subbed for a class and would ask the class, "Did you know all this land used be Cheyenne and Arapaho territory?" Now, the type of cultural enrichment provided is storytelling, hymns, teepee demonstrations, language classes, beading, and dancing, but the responsibility for cultural enrichment is no longer her sole responsibility; it is provided by various tribal programs and departments and welcomed by the school administration. She continues to partner with the tribal education department to provide tutoring services and cultural enrichment for her students.

Natalie also talked about the services that the department provides.

I don't know another Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal program that we have that has done or has had as much impact. I say that personally, from that professional perspective too, you know... *the sheer range*, you know... *'from birth to grave,'* yeah, the full range of services. I remember growing up and receiving the clothing voucher and at the time of course the clothing voucher wasn't a whole lot. But like, it was still something, it was still enough to get us that much more than what my parents could give us, *right?*

I remember always being happy to receive that and now knowing the amount that my nieces and nephews receive. I'm just so happy that they're able to get that much more.

I'm so happy to see that it has grown over all these years.

Natalie received a scholarship from the higher education scholarship program. She also remembered how her brother received the scholarship, as well, for his master's degree, which covered most of his tuition and fees. This meant he did not have to take out any student loans. Natalie also shared how she was visiting with someone who has done some work with the tribe, and described how he shared with her,

I'm always putting your tribe out there and telling people you need to check in and see what they do for their people because they're doing a lot. I'm not seeing that from other tribes, I'm not seeing the amount of effort and support and resources that go back into the community.

This is a powerful statement because this is what happens when there is a steadily increasing contribution from our tribe's revenues from gaming, as well as our skill development in grant writing. This has also allowed capacity building to transform how external partners view us as a nation.

Regarding this growth in resources and corresponding growth in services and capacities for CADOE, for Natalie it began with Quinton Roman Nose and his strategic thinking when he was over the department. As an example, Natalie describes how the Department of Education provided an opportunity to play basketball out of state with other Cheyenne and Arapaho students. It began with traveling to Denver to play in the All-West Classic, but Quinton would always include an educational aspect during the basketball trips. He would set up college visits to

the University of Colorado Boulder, the University of Denver, and visits to the Sand Creek Massacre site in Eads, Colorado. In addition to basketball, this allowed the department to provide other opportunities that were significant for Cheyenne and Arapaho people.

Natalie recalled a time she was invited to participate in a Native knowledge bowl in Colorado Springs when she was in high school, another opportunity provided by the education department. She remembered going the first year and how her team didn't really prep, but they won a sportsmanship award because they cheered for the other teams and made friends with everyone. Natalie shared, "But it was something again that was sponsored by the education department. I think that these types of resources that are provided, the *impact that they make*." She continued to reflect, "We're so used to having them (services), as a tribal community. We're so used to having access to them (services) we don't know what it is not to have them." Natalie's story is important, but we can also assume that she is not the only student to have been positively impacted by the services and opportunities the Department of Education has provided. Services and opportunities are important, but as a student you rarely think about where the funding is coming from to provide these benefits.

The opportunities and services provided by the tribes have also been credited by participants for strategic leadership and capacity building efforts by Quinton Roman Nose and Teresa Dorsett. During their leadership tenures it was a crucial time in overall growth and development for the tribes. Wanda recalled, "Whoever the chairperson of the tribe was at the time, named Quinton as the director and he's the one that really started putting everything together." Wanda also remembered during this time that due to politics the administration would appoint their own cabinet, so Quinton and Teresa would often replace each other as director for

the department. Their tenure was also paired with an increase in funding, which seems to have amplified their capacity building efforts.

Prior to the opening of the Lucky Star Casino in Concho, Oklahoma in 1993, all tribal programs were funded by federal funds or what was referred to as “claims.” According to Wanda, “What really helped the department was when the gaming funds came in.” The tribes did not have additional funding to supplement tribal programs and/or to create new tribal programs. Once the casino opened and began generating revenue the tribes decided to immediately put that money back into the tribe – and education and direct services were a high priority. The casino provided additional funding, and the gaming revenue was partitioned into different departments/programs by creating the Gaming Revenue Allocation Plan (GRAP). In October 2001, the Tribal Council¹⁰ passed a resolution to create a GRAP to meet the specific needs of the Tribes and its members and provide allocation of the following (see Table 4.1): economic development, education, elder care, culture and heritage, burial, election board, health board, emergency assistance, and per capita.

Throughout the years the GRAP continued to be amended as the Tribal Council and administration saw fit. The tribal government decided that certain percentages would be provided to programs to increase services or build new tribal programs. This is an example of tribes asserting sovereignty by determining the needs of the communities and deciding to meet those needs.

¹⁰ The Tribal Council shall be comprised of all Members of the Tribes age eighteen and older. The Tribal Council shall have the power to set policy for the Tribes, the Tribal Council shall have the exclusive power to approve the annual budget, and the Tribal Council shall have the power to authorize the Governor to enter treaties, compacts, or any contract.

Table 3. Old Gaming Revenue Allocation Plan (GRAP)

Percentage of GRAP	Program
30%	Economic Development
10%	Education
16%	Elder Care
5%	Culture and Heritage
5%	Burial
2%	Election Board
2%	Health Board
10%	Emergency Assistance
20%	Per Capita

It is important to share the following story as it contributes to my experience as a community-based leader. All my life I played basketball and was always an athlete. While I was at Haskell, I was a student athlete and participated in track and field and cross country. As mentioned previously, in May 2005, I graduated with my bachelor's degree and returned home hoping to be hired by the tribes. Simultaneously the tribes were working on a new constitution and the gaming revenue allocation plan. There were several community-based tribal leaders who had an idea for a new tribal program called R.E.Sp.E.C.T., which meant Recreation, Exercise, Sports, for the Elders and Children of our Tribes. The primary focus of the program was to provide financial assistance and create opportunities for our tribal youth athletes to compete and hopefully go to college on an athletic scholarship. We knew our kids were talented athletes, but

what separated them from their non-Native counterparts was money. Eddie Hamilton, Parry Roman Nose, and Christine Levi (tribal members and community leaders) wrote a resolution to amend the GRAP and secure a percentage to fund the R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program. In October 2005, they asked me to read the resolution at the Annual Tribal Council meeting and express my support of the program, as a former student athlete. The resolution was passed to amend the GRAP plan as outlined in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4. *New Gaming Revenue Allocation Plan (GRAP)*

Percentage of GRAP	Program
25%	Economic Development
10%	Education
16%	Elder Care
5%	Culture and Heritage
10%	Emergency Assistance
5%	Burial Assistance
7%	R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program
1%	Election Board
1%	Health Board
20%	Per Capita Payments

Once the program began operating, I was hired as the Exercise Coordinator for the R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program in June 2006. This was my first permanent job in a leadership/management capacity. While it was difficult to create and establish a new tribal

program, the program is still in operation with the same vision and mission. Being invested in my community and people as an educator, leader, and advocate did not happen overnight. Yet, it was supported by gaming revenues, which put me back on the road...Back to Concho. Where all good roads lead ... and where all this continues to grow.

The C&A Tribes currently operate 12 different departments under the executive leadership, and the casino generates over \$42 million in revenue yearly. A key reason the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes could provide these new and expanded opportunities for students and families is because of gaming revenue, which is supplemental to federal and state funding. Wanda remembered when they received the additional funding and shared, “That’s helpful and you can do more things. Help your students and provide better services with adequate funding. The gaming funds really helped education.” Although the higher education scholarship program receives funding from the BIA, it is used strictly for scholarships. There isn’t any funding for emergency cases or situations, such as transportation, deposits for rooms or dorms. When the department first received the gaming funding it was while Quinton was the Executive Director. Wanda recalled having a big meeting with Quinton and other education staff in the early 2000s and being told how much they were going to be receiving from the gaming revenue allocation plan. These gaming funds allowed them to increase the scholarship amounts from \$500 to \$800; and now, students currently receive \$1,500 a semester as freshmen. Today, CADOE is one of the larger TEDs in the Southern Plains. operating with much more funding and infrastructure than many of our peers. This is because these foundations were laid early, and with strategic leadership were translated into new programs for higher impact that continues into my tenure as director.

Gaming revenue funds provided by the casinos have increased significantly since its inception. This has helped the tribes' overall impact on our communities by providing jobs, revenue, and opportunities for tribal members. But we also continue to diversify. In the last decade we've started engaging in other forms of enterprise and revenue generated through economic development, expanding departments and programs, and services for tribal members.

I have been fortunate to receive many opportunities and program services from the Department of Education as a student, and the education department has played such an important role in my development socially, culturally, and academically. The Department of Education continues to impact my life, now as a leader. I am fortunate to have inherited the work – capacity building and strategic accumulation of revenues - of Wanda, Francine, Teresa, and Quinton. The systems, opportunities, and services they have built have made my job easier and the ability to continue what they started. I am also grateful I can conduct this study. This allows me to not only learn former leaders' stories and experiences, but I also get to reflect on my own. It is because of the Department of Education I am the leader, educator, and advocate I am today. Just as they were my mentors, and still are, they had their own mentors. I'm part of that longer term capacity growth related to technical systems knowledge learned through mentorship.

Growing Tribal Programs with Systems Technician Mentorship

Every participant in this study has had impact or been impacted by opportunities provided by tribal programs throughout the years. This includes the participants' time as a student or as a professional, and other experiences that allowed them to develop unique systems skills for leading in tribal education contexts. For example, Prayer Cloth Woman not only helped create the higher education scholarship committee she also served on the committee. She was

able to create policies and procedures that continue to evolve. Currently, she is serving on the Charter School Design Team that is creating the mission, vision, and standards for a charter school that centers Cheyenne and Arapaho languages, values, and beliefs. While we have our innovative ideas for educational programming, their leadership depended on their abilities to learn how to build and navigate complex systems. Mentorship of these leaders, when they were earlier in their career, became an essential capacity building moment for growing new programs.

Wanda Whiteman began working under the umbrella of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes around the late 70s. She shared how her husband was looking for a job and the Tribes encouraged Wanda to come and apply as well. She recalls,

He came home and said they want you to go apply over there. I said, ‘Who does?’

He said, ‘Yeah, they want you to go over there and apply.’

I said, ‘That doesn’t sound right.’ But I went over there where they were recruiting tribal members to go work for the CETA Program¹¹. So that’s where I got my first job.

Initially, Wanda worked with the Comprehensive Employment and Training ACT (CETA) Program. This program allowed tribal communities to provide job training with local and state government agencies. Tribal programs provide opportunities and most importantly services for tribal members.

Around the same time, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act¹² (ISDEA) of 1975 passed. Shortly after, the tribes began working to establish federal programs.

¹¹ The CETA Program changed to JTPA as a result of the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982. This was another federal assistance program that prepared youth and unskilled adults for entry into the labor force. Currently, this program still exists and is now the DREAMS Program that functions under the C&A Tribes’ Department of Labor.

¹² A law that authorized federal agencies to enter into contracts with Native nations to administer their own social programs (McCoy, 2024).

To do so the tribe needed to write and establish 638 contracts to ensure they would be able to administer federal programs. It was also important for tribes to understand the importance of treaties, federal Indian policy, and most importantly the ISDEA. This is how the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes wrote their initial contracts. Mann shared in her work about the Anglo who had a Ph.D. in education from Indian State University, his name was William Berlin. He prepared proposals to contract for Higher Education Assistance and Vocational Education programs from the bureau.

At the time, there was no blueprint, degree program, or certificate for tribal members to learn how to build capacity or assert sovereignty. As Prayer Cloth Woman described, Dr. William Berlin was respected by the business committee and his employees because of how smart he was. Again, relationships led to enhanced capacities.

Wanda discussed the value of mentorship by Dr. William Berlin. As previously discussed, Wanda learned to be a good typist at Riverside Indian School, a skill that was pivotal for Dr. Berlin and Wanda's collaborative leadership. Wanda shared,

So, that's where I got my start. I worked for CETA, got my training, and they placed me with Dr. William Berlin who was my director. He was also a professor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU). I was still under the tribe, and they paid my wages. I would do the typing for his tests, make his coffees, whatever he needed me to do. He was from Indiana originally and there were no Indians there, I guess. He really liked Indians because once he got around us, he started going to dances. He also got interested in the language and got connected with Jasper Washa. Jasper was on the

business committee and wanted to hire him as the education program director. At the time it wasn't a department, it was only an office.

After Dr. Berlin was offered the job by the tribe he resigned from SWOSU and Wanda worked for him for about six months. They initially worked without pay because they had to write the contracts to establish the programs and receive the funding. Dr. Berlin told Wanda, "There are no funds to pay you, and you have to work without pay. But I'm writing a grant and as soon as it gets approved, I would get back pay." Wanda said, "Yeah, I'm not doing anything" (laughs). But she "worked with him for five or six weeks and the contract got approved...[then] they paid us for all the backpay, so we worked there for a year".

This is how much of the capacity building began in this era, jump started by Dr. Berlin who began mentoring others. By the time Wanda and Dr. Berlin got to the education office, he began writing contracts and grants, then started applying for grants. Wanda recalled in those days' copiers didn't collate the pages; they would just come out. Wanda and Dr. Berlin would lay out the pages then determine how many copies they needed. They were making copies, stacking them up on the floor and everywhere in the office. Wanda explained how Dr. Berlin applied for the Johnson O'Malley and Vocational Rehabilitation grants, and "all these were from public law, oh gosh, PL638. Public law opened for tribes to govern themselves." Wanda remembered how Dr. Berlin got the programs going. She shared, "He did it out of his mind. I would see him. I would notice him just thinking. He wrote all the contracts by hand, *and then I typed them. It was an important change.*" Dr. Berlin and Wanda wrote the initial 638 contracts to establish some of the first tribal programs for the Department of Education. This became foundational for what is

now a department that has 100 plus employees and has expanded to 12 tribal programs with over a \$12 million-dollar budget.

Francine had a similar experience working for the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Program during the summer. Francine shared with me,

Actually, your grandfather was the head of the JTPA Program. I worked for Wanda Loneman; she was my first supervisor. I was only 14 at the time so I couldn't work a full day, only half a day. At the time I worked for O&M and Farm and Ranch¹³.

Francine enjoyed her time working for the JTPA program during the summer of the first year. She applied to work again the next summer. Her next site of employment was with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) office in El Reno in the Individuals Indian Money (IIM) office. Francine was able to work with her aunt Ruby Tiger, who taught her how to file. Francine recalled, "There was a lot of mailing out that we did but I worked for her one summer, that's how I learned about typing and office work." The skills Francine learned in the summer youth employment program would be vital for her future career as an educational leader in the Department of Education.

The CETA, JTPA, and Developing Responsible Employees Aptitude and Marketing Success (DREAMS) Program are important because they provide working opportunities for youth and adults. These opportunities lead to careers and tribal members making an impact on tribal programs. *The summer after I graduated eighth grade from Darlington, I applied to work for the JTPA Program. I was hired and my first supervisor was Teresa Dorsett in the Department of Education. At the time I remember the JOM, Higher Education, Voc Rehab, and Adult Education programs were all housed in one office at the tribal administration building. I*

¹³ Operations and Maintenance Program.

remember working with my aunts, Francine and Christine, with their filing for the JOM Program. I remember working with Wanda to file applications for the higher education scholarship program. I would also learn how to answer the phone and provide information about the services the department offers to tribal members. Although I don't remember every detail of that experience, I remember asking my mom if I could continue to work there after the summer ended. Obviously, I couldn't continue working due to the program ending, but I do remember having the desire to continue that type of work someday.

Defining and Asserting Sovereignty

I remember the first time I saw the word sovereignty. As embarrassing as it is to share, it was during my first semester at Haskell. Some friends and I were going to the store and there was a car in front of us with a tribal tag and the word sovereignty was on it. I remember asking, what does that word mean? I'm not sure if anyone answered or even knew the answer. Now that I can reflect on moments like this, my journey as a student and professional has been unintentionally tied to understanding and asserting sovereignty.

Early in the project I was eager to sit down with my participants to begin my interviews, ready to begin my research after spending years in classes dabbling in the norms and jargon of the academy. Even Indian Country's pockets of academia have their own form of jargon, and it's been a long immersion process to sort out, as I continue to do. But before I began, my assumption was that every participant knew or understood exactly what I was asking, or I would get a direct answer. As a doctoral student I am used to being in "intellectual" spaces that use this type of jargon regularly. So, when I started talking about sovereignty, some of the participants' facial expressions were either surprised or at times perplexed, as if they weren't

certain what to say or how to answer; which also took me by surprise. One of the participants, with hesitation, said, “Well, what does it mean to you?” Another participant said, “I don’t know, what do you think?” This led to discussion of how we define sovereignty...

Tribal sovereignty is mostly defined as the right for tribal nations to govern themselves. As the word sovereignty has become more prevalent over the decades, it is now general knowledge that sovereignty means the right to govern ourselves as tribal nations. However, through my conversations with participants, I found the term sovereignty has not always been used in the same manner – or it hasn’t been as accessible as it now, nor was it used regularly. We shouldn’t be surprised, as there is research that asserts that public-school systems lack curriculum and/or teachings about Indigenous history, sovereignty, or federal Indian policy.

While this study focuses on how the participants have *asserted sovereignty* while working in and around the Department of Education, our conversations didn’t jump directly into the act of asserting sovereignty. Rather, I frequently found myself in conversations where we were wrestling with the word sovereignty itself. Wanda explained:

I can say this, some students *don’t even know what sovereignty means* and in the older days *it was like a foreign word*, sovereignty and... *Indigenous*. I know it’s gotten more prevalent...more useful, and helpful. Those words became more knowledgeable, and it *helped the students to know who you are*.

When Francine was asked about asserting sovereignty she hesitated before responding. Within her answer she turned it back to me, “But sovereignty is, I don’t know, *what do you see?*” She seemed to think twice about her answer but wanted to know what I thought about sovereignty. I believe her hesitation had to do with me as an academic and the formality of the

interview process. She felt like she needed to say the right answer, or as if I was quizzing her, an elder. Wanda wanted reassurance of the right definition before proceeding, affirming what she had already expressed - the word sovereignty was not utilized the way it is now.

Overall, the participants in this study had varied understandings and perspectives of how to define sovereignty. For Dara, her perspective on sovereignty was centered on culture. She explained,

As a Tribe, we still have what we always had. I feel like we're powerful as a tribe, I also feel like we still have our ceremonial ways which make us stronger people. We show our children, our families, and people around us that we all support one another. That's what I want for my children and my grandchildren now. We are teaching or carrying on our traditions, showing our kids that we are not going away, we are still strong, and speak up for who we are and always will be. We're strong because of our prayer.

She finds it important to teach her students at Darlington who the Cheyenne and Arapaho people are from a cultural perspective. She treats all her students - both Native and non-Native - like they are her family, and most of them are her actual family.

An example of asserting sovereignty shared by the participants in this study was creating new guidelines for the BIA, or creating a guidebook for students and families, or empowering parents. Teresa shared her perspective on asserting sovereignty and believes the tribes are lacking in that area. She stated, "If you asserted your authority, your sovereignty, *we would be educating our own kid's right. Bottom line, we're not doing that.*" She believes as a tribe we are heading in the right direction because of the contact we have with students in the public schools. She also

reflected that the purpose of the initial STEP grant was to help us build capacity and work alongside the state department, but that partnership has strayed a little bit.

It is impossible for Francine do her job without the involvement of the parents. She shared,

Even all these years I was trying to empower our parents, provide them with information that they need because they don't know how strong a voice they are. Teaching them and showing them, I can't do this without you. You must be part of this and then I educate them about what Johnson O'Malley does.

Throughout the years there have been a lot of people who don't know what Johnson O'Malley does. There have been budget hearings where tribal members did not understand the difference between JOM and Title VI and believed they were the same program. If we do not know how these programs are supposed to function, how do we expect LEAs to understand them? Francine believes that empowering the parent is important. In the past when she hosted parent workshops it was just her leading the class, but once the parents were able to learn and understand, they began building one another up, sharing ideas, and helping each other.

Wanda remembered when the BIA used to run everything. For example, if you wanted to go to college, you had to go to Anadarko and talk to Luke Toyebo. She remembered her husband wanted to go to Southwestern, and he had to go talk to Luke. After they spoke, Luke wrote out his grant and scholarship right there. At the time they didn't really have any admission requirements, you didn't have to bring your CDIB (Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood), write a personal letter, have a degree plan, or any of those things. Wanda shared, "My husband said, 'I

want to go to college; I want to go to Southwestern.’ Luke said, ‘OK, bring me your class schedule’, and wrote out his award letter.” At the time, Wanda did not agree with this process.

Once Wanda became the director of the higher education scholarship program she said, “I told Teresa something is not right, it’s not working. The BIA guidelines we are going along with is not working.” For example, she shared if a student went to school for the first two weeks and got their grant and dropped out, they would give them another chance in the spring. They would get the grant and do the same thing. Wanda shared, “I said it’s not working because what the BIA is going by is saying, no matter what happens this semester you’re going to get another chance.” She sat down and went through each admissions application, every personal letter, and determined what needed to be included in it. She remembered some of the letters just said I want to go to college, I want to get a degree, but Wanda believed students needed to set goals. So, they wrote all the scholarship requirements down: admission letter from the college, class schedule, degree plan, and goals. They created the process and wrote it as bylaws and sent them to Anadarko, to Connie Fox. Wanda remembered Connie telling her, “We were the first ones that ever did that, the first tribe that ever wrote bylaws.”

Natalie’s story on asserting sovereignty was interesting because she recognized that she works in a western institution with western concepts that are sometimes opposite of how she was raised as a Cheyenne woman with cultural teachings. Natalie shared,

How we hold ourselves as Cheyenne women, there’s always a struggle. I don’t really aim to be someone out there in front cause that’s not how I was taught to be. It’s just that internal struggle you know in this work for me. I’m expected to do these things, but I struggle with that. You’re expected to be kind of a little bit self-promoting right, to be

known for your work. *But the way that I was taught and how I was supposed to be, you're not thinking about yourself - it's how your community recognizes you.*

Natalie also recognized how students with traditional teachings may struggle in public school systems centered on western frameworks and leaders who still don't understand us. Natalie recalled,

I think back to these educational spaces and how we strive to fit ourselves into those spaces. There's still that amount of disconnect because *our values, how we were taught to carry ourselves, and our teachings come from leaders that don't align with these western spaces.*

Natalie also touched on the spiritual aspect that is not accounted for in western spaces. "We are taught how to carry ourselves, to be humble, to think of others, and serving others that are not held in high esteem from a western perspective." Lastly, Natalie shared,

I guess I can only really speak for Cheyennes because my grandma was the one you know was Cheyenne. It's like our life was there, a full connection throughout our lives to our environment. To you know *our families, our communities*, this whole connection wasn't parceled out in these specific boxes, specific areas. That's life today in society how we operate.

Natalie also asserted that it is important for anyone in the Department of Education working with school leaders to help them try and understand how to better serve our students.

Whether or not the participants understood sovereignty, they were unknowingly asserting sovereignty throughout their careers. They have always been committed to educating students about who we are as Cheyenne and Arapaho people.

As a reminder, the long-established treaty rights in education have evolved over time to serve American Indian/Alaska Native students in public schools. American Indian student enrollment in public schools began to increase through the 1900s due to boarding schools closing, paired with urban relocation programs. But this came with conflict as states clashed with the federal government, with battles over who pays for these increased enrollments. Once again, these unique programs exist because of the treaty promises made by the federal government. The money promised for to educate Indian students would follow them into local school districts and this is the reason for federal programs such as Title VI, Impact Aid, and Johnson O'Malley. But this also created a sustained critique found across Indian Country/ These programs exist because of treaty promises, but who gets to choose how the money is used? Is it being used to improve the education of our Native students?

During Teresa's tenure as Executive Director for the Department of Education, she recalled an incident with a school district, where the funding for impact aid was being spent. While they were trying to work with the schools, she had important questions like, what are you doing and how are you using your impact aid? She found out they weren't using the funding for the correct things. Their hearings, their meetings, and their parents were not informed. Teresa shared, "We had to report a school district to the federal government for forging parent signatures. The most important questions we asked were: How were they using the money? *How was it benefitting our kids?*"

After years of abuse of federal funds and the mistreatment of Native students, a significant shift happened in Indian education. The Every Student Success Act of 2015 was passed, and LEAs were required to add mandatory tribal consultations for Title VI formula

grants. A school district was required to consult with local tribes within a 40-mile radius if their student population had 50% enrollment of AI/AN students or received over \$40,000 in Title VI funds. In 2016, CADOE began attending tribal consultations with school districts that met the requirements for the mandatory tribal consultations. This became an opportunity for Native Nations to assert sovereignty. Initially, only five school districts in the service area met the requirements for a mandatory consultation. During the first year of consultation there was hesitation from the tribes and schools because there was still a layer of mistrust due to ongoing issues. The purpose of the initial meetings was to discuss solutions for student and family issues and most importantly funding. Initially, our administrative staff would travel to the school districts to meet, but over time we required the schools to meet in the Department of Education in Concho.

Francine, who is the current JOM Coordinator, has participated in tribal consultations and thinks they are beneficial for the TEA and LEA. She explained,

Well, just like with the implementation of the tribal consultation meetings...we never had those. I think that's a plus on both sides for the school and the tribes. That way these schools can learn more about us as a people and know what our children need because a lot of them think we're the same. And we're not, we think differently, we have different family values than what they think we have.

She was clearly associating the assertion of sovereignty with increased opportunities to embed cultural education into our schools, indicating that one way to assert sovereignty is to find ways to share who we are as Cheyenne and Arapaho people, especially in educational spaces not built around our cultural ways.

From my personal experience as Executive Director, after the first year of consultations relationships increased significantly with the superintendents, principals, and federal program administrators. For the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes this led to increased partnership on the following discretionary grants: State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP), Native Youth Community Project (NYCP), and Accessing Choices in Education (ACE). These partnerships have proved to be beneficial for Native students in western rural Oklahoma, with increased representation of Cheyenne and Arapaho tutors, mentors, and education specialists. CADOE currently attends more than 15 tribal consultations with LEAs that are more than willing to share student data, budget information, and ideas on how to meet students' needs.

Asserting sovereignty through tribal consultations allowed the tribes to have a voice regarding how money was being spent. We were allowed to voice our families' and students' concerns and/or misunderstandings. It has been helpful for everyone to have open communication between the TEA and LEA. There were several instances where the Department of Education served as a liaison between the family and the school district. Representation matters in western rural Oklahoma. There is a difference between our students' experiences and students throughout other parts of Oklahoma. This is why it is necessary for school districts to utilize Title VI funds to employ an Indian Education Coordinator/Director to meet the unique needs of AI/AN students.

Dara knew how important it was to utilize the tribes' resources to meet students' needs. Through the Department of Education and other departments/programs they could invite speakers, provide incentives, and host cultural classes. Most importantly, the Department of Education and its programs could pay for the cultural instructors – another assertion of

sovereignty in association with asserting culture. Dara also believed the students needed opportunities to learn the Cheyenne and Arapaho languages. She shared, “I love culture, that’s what important to our people. We’re losing it a little at a time too, but we got to keep letting them hear our speakers, letting them do hands on activities.” She happily accepted help from the tribe and the school is open to any type of partnership from the tribes’ departments and programs.

Natalie discussed asserting sovereignty more focused on student and family voice, and representation in school districts. She believed that if tribal students and families have an actual voice, they are more likely to be engaged with the school. Most importantly, having representation within the school district is crucial. Natalie stated, “It’s really sad to say that out in western Oklahoma our tribal families, our communities are still experiencing a closed off education system that is not representative of our values, our teachings, you know anything like that.” In the past 10 years there has been growth in the Department of Education, and she sees how the partnerships with the school systems are beneficial to students. For example, she shared,

There are some examples I can think of where relationships have been strengthened, for example, at El Reno, *where our Native students are feeling more represented, feeling like they have more opportunities to engage than ever before.* There’s a lot of good work being done that’s coming out of the Department of Education.

The participants in this study were raised in various locations, and their education and careers have taken them across Oklahoma and the United States. However, all have returned to Concho - me included - *because all good roads lead back to Concho.*

Summary

The participants in this study have worked in and around the Department of Education for the past 50 years. Their leadership and ability to pass down capacity building and asserting sovereignty through partnerships and relationships, technical internal and external systems knowledge, and systems technician mentorship has allowed me as a leader to not only expand but amplify my leadership. That includes new systems, new knowledge, and new partnerships relationships. I have been able to grow ecosystem for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education by building capacity and asserting sovereignty.

Conclusion: Concho University

One day we were having a meeting with the higher education scholarship program staff as we were preparing for a back-to-school event for our students. We were discussing what incentives we were going to give the students. One of the advisors said we want to make a crewneck sweater like what universities sale in their bookshops. But what should we put on it? After throwing around ideas of what to put on the crewneck, Emily Chavez said, “What about Concho University?!” We all said, “Yes, that’s perfect!” I told Emily, “You’ve done enough work for the day. please go home.” Everyone laughed and in unison said, “Yih!”¹⁴

For me, Concho has and will always be a place to gather. A place to pray, mourn, sing, dance, celebrate, eat, play bingo, and now where I report to work every day. Every morning, I walk into my office that exists because of the Concho Indian School. My office as an Executive Director is in former offices, former classrooms, and former dorms that were once occupied by

¹⁴ Cheyenne and Arapaho slang used by tribal members after sharing a joke, story, or experience. This term can also be used as a complete sentence.

Native American children seeking an education and where my grandparents reported to work daily. I do not take for granted that I get to work in a space that holds so much history for Cheyenne and Arapaho people, but now I get to work with my people serving our people doing meaningful work. The hallways and offices radiate with laughter, yih's, and ayyyyyye's every day. We share stories about our families, our lives. We share meals and sometimes grieve together. Concho is our place for everything that is important to us as C&A people.

At the beginning of my educational journey and career it was never my intention to work in education in any capacity. As my career and educational journey evolved, both were heading into the field of education. I did not realize it at the time, but my grandmother and grandfather set the precedent for working and serving Cheyenne and Arapaho students... taking care of them... while working for the boarding school. My mom continues that work to this day at her public school district where she serves Cheyenne and Arapaho students and families by meeting their unique educational needs. And I get to serve Cheyenne and Arapaho students and families as an administrator for the tribal education department. I realize my job and the work I get to do is a privilege. My responsibility as an administrator is to continue the work my grandparents and mother committed their lives to.

Like I said, all good roads lead back to Concho.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Critical Questions, and Recommendations

Sitting at my desk in Concho and reflecting on the impact Dr. Mann's work has had on my educational and leadership journey. I find myself referring to this quote Dr. Mann (1997) shared in her book, "Each member of the tribe is expected to contribute to the good of The People" (preface). And this is my contribution to The People.

This study allowed for a deeper understanding of Cheyenne and Arapaho women in leadership and their stories related to building capacity and asserting sovereignty. The study was inspired by the work of Dr. Mann (1997) in her dissertation, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Education: 1871-1982*. The stories shared in this study are a continuation of Mann's work and contribute to the fields of Indian education, tribal education departments/tribal education agencies, Cheyenne and Arapaho women's leadership, and Cheyenne and Arapaho education. It is a privilege to be able to contribute to Indigenous research and to utilize the critical work of several Indigenous scholars – especially Dr. Mann's work. In this chapter I share the discussion, critical questions, and recommendations for future research.

From Boarding Schools to Public School Education: Improving Visibility of Modern Programs and Lived Experiences

While this research was not primarily focused on boarding schools, what I learned related to participants' choices to attend boarding schools instead of public schools is a compelling reason to make this a focus in future research – particularly mid-to-late 1900s. This finding happened organically as the participants reflected on who they are and where they come from. As Native educators, we frequently understand boarding schools or the "boarding school era" because of historic family experiences. Boarding schools and assimilation processes have been

detrimental to Indigenous students, communities, and tribal nations in the late 1800s and early 1900s. But there is less literature that shares the experiences of AI/AN students in the second or late half of the 1900s. This study asserts that the experiences of some children were positive and helpful, but most importantly during that time participants *made a choice* to attend boarding schools. It is important to state during this time boarding school systems were no longer being run by churches or missions, they were now operating under the Bureau of Indian Affairs and eventually the Bureau of Indian Education.

McCoy (2024) and Sabzalian (2019) emphasize the agency and autonomy of tribal nations, families and students; however, more research specific to the C&A community would be helpful, particularly around school choice and movement between public schools and boarding schools. The participants in this study reflected on their time as students in either public school or boarding school systems. Several participants attended public schools but recognized they were unhappy, and they knew friends or family attending boarding schools such as Concho, Riverside or Fort Sill, and advocated to their parents for the choice to attend school there instead. While they were at boarding schools the participants described their experiences in terms of endearment.

For example, Francine shared she had older siblings who were already at Riverside and asked her mom to go to Riverside. Once her mother said yes, she immediately transferred. This self-advocacy with her parents is intriguing and was shared amongst participants. She graduated from Riverside and that's where she met her husband. Teresa attended Concho in middle school and was grateful for the opportunity because she knew her parents needed the help. She described her experience in boarding school as "good." Dara did not hesitate to compare the

public school system she was attended to boarding schools because of the lack of opportunities for the Indian students in El Reno, an Oklahoma public school. Once she convinced her parents to let her go to Fort Sill, she described the experience as “the best time of my life.”

Boarding schools played a fundamental role in how the participants were raised. Prayer Cloth Woman discussed how boarding school education provided valuable tools for their students. She remembered her mother being a good homemaker who always provided their family with home cooked meals. Most importantly, she remembered coming home from school and there was always an after-school snack waiting for her. Prayer Cloth Woman did not like milk, so her mother figured out how to make her strawberry milk. And there was always a piece of cake or cookie waiting for her. She shared, “So I guess boarding schools were useful.” Prayer Cloth Woman fondly described her childhood as being happy and living in Hammon as “the happiest time of my life.”

As mentioned previously, recent books by Sabzalian (2019) (*Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools*) and McCoy (2024) (*On Our Own Terms: Indigenous Histories of School Funding and Policy*), have begun to address the need for more research on the schooling experiences of Indian children. For example, McCoy (2024) shares a story about Dehatkatons, son of the late Onondaga leader Ho-ha-hoa-quā, and his educational journey. McCoy writes:

By the time he left Geneva, he was fluent in English and had, at least initially, adopted Christianity. While missionaries may have seen in him a poster child for assimilation, a closer look indicates that Dehatkatons engaged schooling selectively to protect Onondaga sovereignty and lands against a settler takeover. (p. 23)

While it was necessary for Dehatkatons to pursue an assimilationist education, he continued to center his community's history and teachings. McCoy (2024) writes, "This brief survivance story is one of many examples of the long history of Native people repurposing schooling to advance their nations' future well-being" (p. 24). Like the Onondaga Nation, the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes can reflect on past educational systems while building capacity and asserting sovereignty for future educational systems.

Future research for Cheyenne and Arapaho specific contexts could also expand further on the topics found in Mann's (1997) work, as well. Mann shares, "The public schools were no different in their attempts to transform American Indian children into marginal, dark-skinned white people, completely disregarding differences in orientation and world view that the tribal people had evolved since the beginning of time" (p. 120). Beginning in 1986, the government started contracting with public schools to educate Indian students. Mann shares:

Public school contracts were entered into with those schools willing to accept Indian students on the basis that they were 'to be instructed in classes with white children and to be entitled to and receive all the privileges of white pupils.' Although the schools willingly accepted the tuition paid by the government, some did not adhere to the conditions of the contract and had to give them up when it was ascertained that Indian pupils were segregated into 'separate classes, and in one instance in a separate building.' (p. 119)

Since its inception there have been claims of racism, prejudice, discrimination, lack of opportunity, and lack of understanding of the unique needs of Indian students in public schools/ It is assumed that the white families welcomed Indian students into their school, but they

objected to integration of Indian students (Mann, 1997). Dr. Mann affirms these types of experiences in public schools in western Oklahoma as she shares:

On February 12, 1972, in an unprecedented action, Indian students walked out of the Hammon public schools. Their boycott was based upon three readily identifiable reasons: (1) racial conflict, (2) a 90 percent Indian student dropout rate, and (3) the exclusion of Indian parents from participation in federally funded programs for Indian children. Rather than have their children return to the racially tense school, some parents established an alternative school, which they named the Institute of the Southern Plains. Though funding came from several sources, the primary ones were the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of Indian Education. Monies for operational expense were augmented from private sources such as church groups and foundations. (p. 167)

The stories and experiences shared by the participants in this study assert Mann's claim of public-school education in western Oklahoma. While these experiences persist and remain, the efforts of the tribal education department have had a significant impact on the accountability and positive working relationships that exist between the TEA and LEAs, and these institutions would benefit from ongoing research and advocacy on this topic.

Visibility of current programs that continue to exist because of the trust responsibility is also necessary. Non-native educators may know terms like Title VI, Impact Aid, or JOM because these programs are in the public school system. However, there is little to no education in the public-school classroom explaining why these programs exist. This often leads to misunderstandings about the often termed "special" programs for Indians. According to NCAI, "There is not another race/ethnicity that is as unique as Indigenous people and their educational

systems” (NCAI 2020). This is because Indigenous peoples have “inherent rights and a political relationship with the U.S. government that does not derive from race or ethnicity” (NCAI, 2020). Public school education does not teach or address sovereignty and why tribes are unique. So there continues to be little to no understanding of how sovereignty plays a vital role in educational systems.

Boarding schools through the BIE system also continue into modern contexts and are vital to American Indian/Alaska Native students experiences in education because of what their families, communities, and tribes have experienced in that system. This system is a result of treaties tribal nations signed with the U.S. government. The Treaty of Medicine Lodge promised the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes housing, healthcare, food rations, and education. This is when the responsibility of educating C&A children became the responsibility of the federal government. We need more research and advocacy that examines the impacts of the misunderstandings and invisibility of the *why* behind these programs. Additionally, the unique experiences of students in Darlington Public Schools is an opportunity for future research.

Darlington Public Schools as a Case Study for TEA-LEA Partnership Building

Within close proximity to Concho is Darlington Public Schools, a high-density public school, meaning their American Indian/Alaska Native population is over 25%. As shared by Mann (1997), “Brinton Darlington, a devout and elderly Quaker, was appointed agent of the Upper Arkansas Agency Camp” (p. 23). He eventually relocated the agency to the banks of the North Canadian River, northwest of present-day El Reno (Mann, 1997). Brinton was beloved by the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Today, Darlington Public Schools occupies the space of the former agency run by agent Brinton Darlington.

The significance of Darlington Public Schools is clear. Darlington Public Schools has had an impact on at least two of the participants in this study, both Dara and Natalie, who have benefitted from a high-density public school system in terms of employment and opportunity. Dara was hired by former Superintendent Mr. Meriwether to be a teacher aide and eventually became the Indian Education Director and continues to serve students to this day. Natalie was not only a student who attended Darlington from K-8 but was also an employee when she was an undergraduate student. Additionally, I attended Darlington from K-8 and worked at the school during my holiday breaks when I was attending Haskell. Darlington continues to provide me with employment and opportunity, as I am the cross-country coach for the elementary and middle school teams.

It is important to state that not all the staff at Darlington are Native American or Cheyenne and Arapaho, but they are people who seem to understand how AI/AN students are unique. Natalie shared in her interview that even though Gina and Mr. Meriwether are non-native, they never made her feel different or othered. Natalie stated, “The way they treated us was like how we would be treated by our family.” This reflects their leadership, who they hire, and the opportunities they provide to their Native American students. Most importantly, they value partnerships and a relationship with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and the Department of Education. The relationship CADOE has with Darlington is what we hope to build with every LEA in our service area. Future research would be very beneficial to the Cheyenne and Arapaho community, as well as other Native Nations, if this partnership was explored in a deeper manner to unpack what makes this partnership shine as an example of good and positive partnership development in Indian Country.

Defying Political Stereotypes: Rurality and School Choice

There is also an opportunity to problematize oversimplified stereotypes that come with terms such as “rural”, “local control”, and “school choice”. First, much of Indian Country is rural, and the field of Indigenous education is growing synergies with the fields of rural education. Yet Native people are often stereotyped into oversimplified as left, blue, or liberal on the political spectrum since we are considered “people of color”. However, it is important to acknowledge that 93% of American Indian and Alaska Native students attend public schools (National Indian Education Association, n.d.), and these students are disproportionately found in rural communities (RedCorn et al., 2021). Cheyenne and Arapaho students and families reside in western rural Oklahoma, which is a former reservation territory. As RedCorn & Whitlow (2024) affirm, “with the history of the United States policies aimed at Indigenous peoples being focused on relocation and removal, it’s no surprise that many Native Nations and their reservations are often in rural spaces away from large urban centers” (p. 108). Therefore, Cheyenne and Arapaho education is inherently relevant to the field of rural education.

Lastly, school choice continues to be an important political topic in policy and legislation. Thinking about the participants’ stories, there are some interesting ways school choice might be reconsidered outside of left-right political stereotypes. This also includes conversations around charter schools, as well as local control. The topic of school choice is complicated in nature and is associated with political triggers but can work in favor of tribal nations and their students and families. As an example, from 2017-2021, the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, prioritized school choice as an initiative from the United States Department of Education. The Oklahoma State Department of Education quickly adopted the school choice initiative, and it became a

priority. Then, school choice was made a priority in the Office of Indian Education (OIE) discretionary grant notices. In 2020, CADOE applied for a STEP grant entitled *Enhancing Educational Choice for Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma*. The grant met Absolute Priority 1c: Building capacity to administer and coordinate education programs and Absolute Priority 2: For STEP grant funding to lay the groundwork for many of the relationships necessary to develop an innovative charter school model. The STEP grant supported our communities' efforts to improve our children's educational outcomes by providing increased educational choice for students and families through the development of a tribally authorized charter school model. School choice is a way for tribal nations, TEDs, and TEAs to exercise local control.

The STEP grant began October 1, 2022, and ended September 30, 2025. The goal of the grant was to design a culturally responsive and innovative charter school model that transforms education for our tribal children and inspires and engages them to pursue academic success. The grant had three objectives:

1. Engage our TEA and tribal leaders to develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of the process of launching a Native Charter School and implement initial steps towards that goal.
2. Engage in a thorough and inclusive community planning process to determine the key quality components of our school's design and resources needed to a successful school model.
3. Build in sustainability practices to ensure funding beyond the STEP grant.

One of the most important outcomes was the creation of the Charter School Design Team. The team included tribal leaders and educators and the voices of Prayer Cloth Woman, Teresa, and Natalie. During the interview process, Prayer Cloth Woman shared,

We want our children and grandchildren to live out there and that's why it's so important to have our own charter school. So that they can carry our ways our history, our languages, everything about us into that unknown tomorrow.

The charter school design team played an integral role in creating the portrait of a student and school. They determined the school's name, mission, vision, and student/school attributes by having meaningful dialogue and discussion centered on a Cheyenne and Arapaho worldview. This is an example of RedCorn's (2020) assertion, "leaders must commit to upfront and ongoing intellectual work about what it means to place a nation's governance and cultural systems at the center of a community's collective thinking" (p. 7).

School choice is a form of local control and local control is sovereignty. The stories shared in this study by Teresa, Wanda, Dara, and Francine are examples of them taking control of their educational experiences by choosing to attend boarding schools. Darlington is another example of tribal families choosing to send their children to a high-density public school, even if they live out of district. This is because Darlington leans into collaborative local control with the C&A Tribes.

This study asserts Cheyenne and Arapaho students and families were *choosing* to attend boarding schools not because of test scores or academic rigor, but because they wanted to feel like they belonged and wanted to be in a system that reflected their worldview. Each of the participants would go on to graduate high school, pursue higher education, and most importantly

return home and pursue careers that would impact Cheyenne and Arapaho students and Cheyenne and Arapaho education. Therefore, it would be beneficial for leaders in practice and researchers to explore how these unique educational environments intersect with politically charged concepts such as school choice and local control, and how these overlaps with deeply entrenched rural stereotypes.

Revisiting Conceptual Frameworks

The stories of the participants offer a variety of real-world examples of RedCorn's (2020) assertion that capacity building occurs when leaders "inspire action across multiple systems and motivate leaders to engage in this type of work that pushes against assimilationist status quos" (p. 3). All the leaders I interviewed offered real-world leadership perspectives that align with this framework related to broad and dynamic systems thinking, (re)centering the needs and priorities of political and cultural systems, assessing the landscape and identifying community assets, fostering professional development across systems, systems development and alignment, and fostering a healthy community of practice across all systems.

The participants' stories support the notion that for TED leaders, while their responsibility is to support the education of tribal citizens, that support is limited if they do not have positive working relationships with LEAs, the SEA, BIE, OIE, OEA, and within their own tribal government. Building positive relationships across systems is essential. While organizations do not always intersect, they overlap with similar goals and objectives, and the relationship building that occurs at those intersections grows larger capacities over time. If all systems share common perspective and understanding, AI/AN students' educational needs are met.

Liberating Sovereign Potential

While RedCorn has not worked within a TED or TEA, he provides a valuable external perspective. I can attest that working in a TED is challenging and as RedCorn (2020) states, “leaders must be able to visualize all systems of learning in the community all at once” (p. 3). The participants’ stories affirm that TED directors could benefit from prioritizing what RedCorn refers to as broad and dynamic systems thinking, and examine how each system functions, aligns, and overlaps. RedCorn’s capacity building model includes several tenets that were also affirmed in this research, such as assessing the landscape and identifying community assets, fostering professional growth to enhance teaching and leadership skill sets, and engaging in ongoing systems development and alignment that is helpful to TEDs/TEAs.

A key component of the Liberating Sovereignty Potential (LSP) model (RedCorn, 2020) is sovereignty, both intellectual and political. To liberate educational sovereignty, leaders must unlock intellectual sovereignty first. This must be a community effort to help define and articulate what sovereignty means. Participants shared stories that demonstrated how they built capacity and asserted sovereignty in both intellectual and political ways.

RedCorn (2020) also asserts, “True to what sovereignty and self-determination is on its deepest level is the reality that no other community can, or should, define the culture and governance components in that center” (p. 7). This study is an example of how leaders are defining and articulating what sovereignty means to them. For example, Dara shares the following:

As a Tribe, we still have what we always had. I feel like we’re powerful as a tribe because we still have our ceremonial ways which make us stronger people. We show our

children, our families, and people around us that we all support one another. That's what I want for my children and my grandchildren now. We are teaching or carrying on our traditions, showing our kids that we are not going away, and speaking up about who we are and who we will always be. We're strong because we pray.

This study focuses on two tenets within the capacity building model: building capacity and asserting sovereignty. One thing that could improve this model is more articulation around leadership decision making when considering internal versus external leadership contexts and how they differ and prompt leaders to code switch when moving across systems. For example, building capacity internally would look like improving hiring practices, such as job descriptions that include the necessary skill sets needed to grow. It is ideal to hire an employee who has the experience, background, and educational requirements to meet the needs of the department but that does not always happen. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the department to provide on the job training, onboarding, or willingness to “figure it out.” Working across external systems takes a degree of patience and long-term relationship building, and the development of intergovernmental agreements. These internal-external systems leadership nuances would improve this model in its future iterations.

The liberating sovereign potential model aligns with core components of culturally sustaining revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP) as described by Lee and McCarty (as cited in RedCorn, 2020). The most important aspect of CSRP is the need for “community-based accountability” (RedCorn, 2020). As a reminder, this study is an intersection of liberating sovereign potential and Indigenous feminism because both are rooted in community-based perspectives, experiences, and stories. This study is also an example of how community-based leadership from female leaders is

crucial to building capacity and asserting sovereignty in and around TED/TEA contexts. Their approach of “taking care of people” is one way that they execute CSRP, in addition to RedCorn’s model.

Indigenous Feminism

This study also utilizes an Indigenous feminism framework. While the LSP capacity building model addresses the need to better understand TEDs and TEAs, it does not account for the nuanced gendered experiences when doing systems leadership. The use of an Indigenous feminism lens helped unlock Indigenous women’s leadership stories and experiences. Yet, the overlap in the two conceptual frameworks is sovereignty - defining and asserting sovereignty (RedCorn, 2020) and upholding tribal sovereignty through the lens of Indigenous feminism.

The Indigenous feminism framework discussed at the end of Chapter 2 (Barker, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shanley, 1984; St. Denis, 2007) prioritizes the following four tenets: uphold tribal sovereignty, empowerment of women, empower communities, and sexism. Lorelei Means (as cited in Green, 2007) argues that feminism has no use to Indigenous women because we are oppressed first and foremost as Indigenous people, not women. While this is true, I argue that the intersection of being Indigenous, while also being considered a political class, and being a woman, these lived experiences are highly unique and contextualized. Furthermore, since each Native Nation’s customs and traditions are unique, Indigenous feminisms should always hold space for diverse interpretations.

Although not every tenet of Indigenous feminism was unlocked with the participants’ stories, there was an emergence of Cheyenne and Arapaho feminism centered on the belief of “taking care of our people” that is often taught by our families, communities, and tribes. This

belief is transferred when we have the responsibility of taking care of our students, families, and communities.

One of the most important tenets of Indigenous feminism is the empowerment of women. This tenet is initially what drew me to feminism. Francine mentioned how other women had a strong role in her career trajectory because they believed in her. Her first job in education was with the Head Start Program as a teacher aide/van driver. She remembered she was not in the position long because, “Christine Morton snatched me up and asked me if I could come work for JOM,” Francine recalled. She was an administrative assistant for the JOM Program for a couple of years. After working for JOM for a short time, she left to work for the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma City as an administrative assistant. However, the commute from El Reno to Oklahoma City started to become an inconvenience especially when her second oldest was diagnosed with diabetes. During that time her family only had one car, so it was difficult to get back and forth to make all her son’s appointments. Francine recalled driving to work one day and praying, *“Lord, I need a job closer to home, I need to be there for him if something should happen while he’s at school.”* She got to work that day and there was a post it on her computer that said, “Call Teresa,” with the tribes’ work number. Francine immediately called Teresa and Teresa said, “Francine, I would like you to be the JOM Coordinator. I need someone ASAP.” Francine responded and said, “Oh my gosh, yes!” She remembered thinking in that moment I just prayed that prayer. She gave her boss her two weeks’ notice and for the next two weeks she worked the mornings in Oklahoma City and the afternoons in Concho. Once the two weeks were complete, she transferred to JOM permanently and has been there ever since. She recently celebrated her 24-year work anniversary as the JOM Coordinator.

Francine's experience also affirms Ross's (2009) assertion that Indigenous women do not just take on the role as a mentor, but as a sister, auntie, cousin, and daughter. This is an example of how C&A women not only believe in one another but also give each other the opportunity to learn and grow as leaders for the Department of Education.

How the participants empowered the community was often overlapped with stories that connected with tribal sovereignty, sexism, and empowerment of women. Natalie shared how important decision making is for women as leaders and how they take their time to consider other factors compared to men who have the attitude of, "We've got to make this decision quick." Natalie emphasized that in *the process* of making a decision, female leaders take deeper consideration of "their home, the family, the community." Natalie's belief in community is connected to Barker's (2015) assertion that "Indigenous women are interconnected by the responsibility they carry for their families and communities" (p. 50). The community, as Natalie referred to it, is always at the forefront of any decision that is being made by C&A female educational leaders.

Lastly, although the participants shied away from saying sexism explicitly, their stories and experiences said otherwise. There was even mention of sexual harassment - not personally, but observations they have made throughout the years as leaders. Teresa recalled the classic experience where she had an idea, but it was not considered good. Yet, a male colleague made the same suggestion, and everyone agreed it was a great idea. She shared, "I just said that!" Teresa also shared an experience she had with a male colleague when she was spoken to in a negative way and referred to as "old school mentality." As St. Denis (2007) wrote, we "... may have many things in common with feminism struggles, especially against the injustices

resulting from patriarchal, misogynist, and sexist ideologies that have for so long been a foundation in Euro-western societies” (p. 34). Teresa made a written complaint but did not believe the male colleague was disciplined for the interaction. Instead, this issue was addressed informally. The male colleague never addressed her in a negative manner after that. Teresa said while this type of behavior happens often throughout the years it never deterred her from helping or offering solutions to colleagues. She shared advice to Indigenous female leaders that, “we have to keep speaking up.” Teresa believed in Indigenous women’s leadership and asserted that currently most of our tribal leadership is comprised of women. Furthermore, these experiences affirm that Indigenous women are subject to sexism in modern day tribal government organizations.

While we can agree that feminism is not inclusive of Indigenous women’s leadership experiences, there is still a need for Indigenous feminism. Sarah Deer (as cited in Wilbur & Lane, 2025) describes the need for Indigenous feminism by sharing the following in the All My Relations podcast:

Because it’s not a one size that fits all. But it’s particularly a response to settler colonial patriarchy, right? Which looks different than other kinds of patriarchy because you’re not just fighting the patriarchy of the settler colonial state. You’re also battling the patriarchy that has unfortunately taken hold in tribal nations through assimilation, Christianization, and all those patriarchal lessons. So, you’re fighting two fights. So, it’s a very different kind of feminism.

Deer also acknowledges the need for Indigenous or Native feminisms and how it looks different for each Nation. While this study revealed some of these tensions, moving forward there is value

in diving even deeper into our understanding of Cheyenne and Arapaho specific contexts, with a deeper focus on the intersections of assimilation, culture, and gender.

Reflection on the Methods: On Reverence

Since Indigenous methods are often just as much about process, as they are about product (Smith, 1999), I feel compelled to speak to future Cheyenne and Arapaho graduate students who represent the next generation of leaders for our community – the born and unborn. Prior to the interview process I did my best to get myself into a mental space that would exemplify Archibald's (2008) seven principles of Indigenous storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. These principles were essential not only for conducting the study, but for me, as the researcher, as I prepared to hear the stories from the participants. Archibald (2008) shares:

Patience and trust are essential for preparing to listen to stories. Listening involves more than just using the auditory sense. We must visualize the characters and their actions.

We must let our emotions surface. As the elders say, it is important to listen with “three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart. (p. 8)

Each interview was transcribed manually due to the fragility of some of the stories that were shared. It would have been more efficient or saved time to utilize software that transcribed the interviews, but it was my duty as a researcher to protect their stories. Also, out of respect for the stories and vulnerability shared by some of the participants who were elders, I wanted to respect their time by transcribing every word manually. I believe this allowed for a deeper appreciation and understanding of their stories and lived experiences.

Archibald's use of the word *reverence* seems to capture what I experienced. Throughout the interviews I became emotional at times because I was so happy to record and document their knowledges. As Archibald (2008) shares, "If one comes to understand and appreciate the power of a particular knowledge, then one must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibility" (p. 3). There were several interviews where participants became emotional and felt comfortable enough to cry but there were also moments of laughter. As the researcher I believe, due to my age and maturity, I was able to receive, listen, and hear the participants' stories as well as make connections. Simultaneously, I understand that these elders possess additional perspective and maturity that I have yet to experience or grasp. Archibald (2008) shares how Simon Ortiz did not recognize the communal power of stories heard in his childhood until he was older.

The most important parts of this study are the participants, who are all enrolled members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. Each has made significant contributions to Cheyenne and Arapaho education in their respective careers. I did my best to honor their stories but most importantly who they are and where they come from. The timeline for the participants' background stories begins in 1934. As shared by Prayer Cloth Woman, "there's a little bit of irony to the year I was born [1934], that was the year the Indian Reorganization Act was passed, that's the year that Johnson O'Malley came into existence, and I was born right in between the passage of the two." This is why sharing the participants' stories is important. They are our tribe's living educational history.

Future Research in Adult Learning and Leadership: New Opportunities for Synergy

Prior to pursuing my graduate studies in adult learning and leadership I assumed that adult education was only applicable in higher education. As I have learned into organization and administration, program planning, and introduction to adult education, the knowledge is transferable to other areas. Providers of adult education can be “agencies serving both educational and non-educational community needs and agencies that offer adult education for their own members to further other organizational goals” (Ross-Gordon et al., 2017, p. 11).

Adult Learning and Leadership in Practice

The three most important and practical areas for TEDs to put adult learning and leadership into practice is through program planning, strategic planning, and funding. As described in Chapter 2, program planning means creating opportunities for growth and learning for employees, community members, and administrators. Strategic planning is a common practice that separates organizations from those that succeed or fail (Schmidt & Yelich Biniecki, 2016), and securing funding is essential to administrators in all areas of adult education (Yelich Biniecki & Schmidt, 2017).

Program Planning

TEDs/TEAs are employing adult learners to build educational programs for tribal students and families, and program planning literature is highly relevant for researchers and practitioners focused on TEDs/TEAs. But what also makes education departments unique, while they are responsible for building educational programs, they are also responsible for asserting sovereignty for their tribal nation. Program planning for TEDs/TEAs include events/activities like family engagement nights, program services that provide a direct service like a school

clothing application and distributing program services like school supplies and backpacks. TED/TEA employees are responsible for anticipating the needs and wants of tribal students, families, public school districts, and funding agencies, and the employees are program planners who are also adult learners and the liaison between all ecosystems.

Most of the participants in this study who have worked in CADOE all assert that part of their job duties and responsibilities is to understand the importance of program planning. All have utilized needs assessments, negotiating, building stakeholder support, event management, and marketing like Yelich Biniecki (2017) asserts. For example, in Chapter 4 participants discussed the growth in programming over the years, as Natalie emphasized “the sheer range” of “birth to grave” programs, and happy she was to have seen so much growth over the years, particularly as leaders secured additional funds. They also discussed how mentors showed them some of the technical capacities that grew as more grants and programs became the norm. This alone shows a parallel need for program planning skills in TEDs/TEAs working to build their capacity and assert their sovereignty. TED/TEA employees must know how to do all of these topics simultaneously, most often without the proper training and skillset.

Strategic Planning

Personal philosophy can also serve as a tool to ensure effective practice (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1998). As a leader I had begun with answering the question, do my personal values and beliefs align with the organization’s mission? Answering this loaded question allowed me to think critically and reflect on my personal values and beliefs while relearning the organization’s mission. To get specific about an organization and/or program the following questions are recommended: “why the activity is being planned, whose needs are being served, and what

consequences (positive and negative) may result from the activity” (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1998, p. 117). Once again, practitioners in Indian education might reflect on whether their organizational mission at its core is tribally specific, or if it’s a westernized notion adopted under the banner of tribal sovereignty because we, as leaders, were trained in westernized institutions.

At the beginning of 2020, CADOE was in the process of restructuring and reorganizing the department. To operate more efficiently and effectively, the department decided to construct a new strategic plan that had five departmental goals. Schmidt and Yelich Biniecki (2016) state, “Strategic planning does not guarantee success, but it can help organizations be successful” (pp. 169-170). This was an example of RedCorn’s (2020) working model and the need for systems development and alignment, which is unique because quite often TEDs strategic planning must work to bend other systems to their priorities – particularly since Native Nations are heavily dependent on western systems for professional training.

Prior to 2020, CADOE had not updated its mission and vision and did not have a strategic plan in place. Schmidt and Yelich Biniecki (2016) share, “Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it” (p. 172). As an department, these are questions we never asked ourselves, as we were just pressing forward to working to assert sovereignty without stopping to think about our fundamental purpose. However, there was a need to align programs because the department was providing duplicate services to the same students and families. This process allowed us to do this internal reflective work. But still, as more tribes build their capacities in education and workforce development, there is very little research on what strategic planning looks like in tribal contexts. What are tribes prioritizing? What sort of

processes, frameworks, or data collection instruments do they use? These are all worthy of both leadership practice and research moving forward, specifically in the Cheyenne and Arapaho context.

When reflecting on these notions, I (Whitlow, 2024) shared, “several programs operated from an individualistic perspective” that led programs to operate in silos. The strategic planning process began with collecting the goals and objectives of all 13 programs that would be combined into the following five department goals as shared in Whitlow (2024):

1. To protect and preserve our C&A language and culture by continuing meaningful implementation for tribal citizens.
2. To increase student engagement in school by providing support and direct assistance.
3. To offer C&A family’s access to affordable, high quality, holistic early childhood education services.
4. To promote interest and awareness surrounding college and career readiness among C&A tribal citizens.
5. To continue to build the capacity of CADOE to better serve students and family’s educational needs. (p. 39)

The purpose of identifying five program goals was to remind every program and its employees that we are working together as a collective to achieve our goals. Every program was used to having their own goals and objectives and operating individually even though some programs overlapped in services. Employees became used to operating in silos and became very territorial of their programs.

This siloing is a common complaint across Indian Country as “cultural education”, “education departments”, “historic preservation” and “language programs” all represent individuals with highly nuanced expertise yet get lumped into “education” broadly speaking. Additionally, the value of this kind of restructuring and institutional planning that I experienced is also similar to what participants experienced when transitioning from the old business council to the new government via the new constitution in 2006. Participants expressed how this institutional readjustment allowed for a new era of growth in educational programming. These changes also pose ethical dilemmas because program planners are being asked to deviate from the existing organizational values and norms, but also reconsider the values and beliefs of the wider community (Daffron & Caffarella, 2021). For the Department of Education, in this era our existing funding sources were dictating our values, and they were not necessarily reflective of a C&A worldview. Overall, the participants emphasis on how valuable the new governmental change was for education, also shows us that institutional planning and restructuring is very important to tribal education.

Funding

Administrators for tribal organizations, TEDs, and TEAs must understand the importance of not only securing funding, but to advocate for continued funding for their organization. Funding is necessary to serve tribal students and families, but to also build capacity and assert sovereignty. Aligning funding with the organization’s strategic plan, mission, and vision are necessary for administrators to learn how to do.

Teresa shared during her tenure CADOE began applying for grants from OEA and OIE. These grants were necessary to build capacity and relationships with LEAs. The first

discretionary grant CADOE applied for was with the Chickasaw Nation because she recalled they would have a better chance in securing a grant if they applied as a consortium. Both grants allowed CADOE to begin building a relationship with El Reno Public Schools in 2015 and CADOE continues that work to this day. Overall, participants leadership stories tell us that securing funding allows TEDs and TEAs to build capacity in areas that are not always guaranteed from gaming revenue or state funding.

Summary

The landscape of Indian education is vast, but there is still a lack of understanding of what TEDs and TEAs are and how they function. It would be highly productive for TED and TEA leadership if there was a more concerted effort to build synergy around research and practice from Indigenous education and adult learning and leadership. Lastly, it is the responsibility of the tribal organization, TEDs, and TEAs to treat its employees as adult learners who require growth and opportunity as well.

Grant Opportunities to Build Internal and External Capacity

As mentioned in the study, participants shared stories about how grants allowed the department to build capacity. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Indian Education began administering the pilot State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) grant in 2012 (RedCorn et al., 2023). The purpose of the grant was "to promote collaboration between TEDs/TEAs, SEAs, and LEAs, as well as to build capacity for the TEDs/TEAs to conduct certain administrative functions" (RedCorn et al., 2023, p. 850). The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribe partnered with the Chickasaw Nation to secure a pilot grant in 2012. The STEP grant required the TEA to partner with LEAs to meet the requirements of the grant. CADOE partnered with El

Reno, Canton, and Darlington Public Schools. It is important to state this was the first for public school districts to partner with the education department on a grant and to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Each of these school districts use their Title VI money to hire an Indian Education Director or Coordinator, which is helpful when building relationships with LEAs.

The pilot grant was administered by the Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes from 2012-2015 and by September 30, 2015 the following goals, objectives, activities, and tasks were completed: established a preliminary and final agreement between the SEA and TEA Consortium, received regularly scheduled training from the SEA about federal grant management activities and reporting procedures, established a memorandum of understanding with each LEA, obtained official authorization from the LEAs to access individual student records in compliance with FERPA, assisted students who were at risk of dropping out by coordinating academic credit recovery programs, and most importantly provided professional development that cultural awareness to teachers, staff, and administrators.

This grant played a significant role in how the Department of Education moved forward when applying for grants that would provide resources, opportunities, and services for C&A students and families. RedCorn & Whitlow (2024) shared the following:

.... we have since acquired several more grants from the Office of Indian Education that have allowed us to grow our institutional relationships across our community. Specifically, since the initial grant, we have partnered with a total of ten school districts in our service area. The grants have also provided our department with much needed data not only from the LEA, but the state as well. From this, CADOE

continues to build capacity which results in opportunity, resources, and assistance for our families and students. (p. 117)

As a result of discretionary grants from OIE, such as, STEP, Native Youth Community Project (NYCP), and Accessing Choices in Education, which focused on Education Specialists, the tribe was able to provide mentoring, tutoring, and counseling services for tribal students.

Throughout the years the Department of Education has evolved from not only providing graduation awards, but providing higher education scholarships, tutoring services, and language classes as well. In other words, the Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders have continued to prioritize education and made significant steps in establishing a new foundation in the latter part of the 1900s. (RedCorn & Whitlow, 2024, p. 112)

Due to the continued relationship building and partnerships, the Department of Education can provide students and families with daily and wraparound services as opposed to a one-time payment each year. The stories included in this study affirm RedCorn & Whitlow's (2024) assertion that "Growing outward from these early partnerships and grant pursuits, we have been able to build from these collaborative efforts and develop more partnerships while also pursuing more funding streams" (p. 117). All the opportunities CADOE provides would not be possible without the partnerships with TEDNA, Academic Development Institute (ADI), Indigenous Solutions, and ImaginEd. "Indigenous people have always shaped the educational experiences of their children, and institutions of education must partner with Native nations, families, and communities moving forward" (RedCorn et al., 2023, p. 839).

Future research could examine and map how partnership grants build capacity over time in terms of relationship development, and grant management infrastructures. Additionally, just as

non-native mentors help participants in this study jump start certain programming because of the technical systems knowledge they possessed, future research and practice could also deepen our understanding of the role of mentorship and systems knowledge development play in capacity building efforts. For the Cheyenne and Arapaho community it would be also beneficial to chart the evolution and maintenance of these relationships and draw direct connections to specific capacity building skills developed and the affiliated resources acquired by the department. Other TEDs and TEAs could use this information to see how a department can grow over several decades.

Cheyenne and Arapaho Male Leadership Perspectives

This study can be further expanded to include Cheyenne and Arapaho male educational leadership stories and experiences. Future research allows for the inclusion of male perspectives on leadership and how they have built capacity and asserted sovereignty. Participants mentioned several men during their interviews who had an impact on the department – e.g., Quinton Roman Nose, Robert Standing Water, and Gordon Yellowman. Both Robert and Gordon were mentioned by participants who were leaders of the department during significant moments for the department. Francine remembered working with Robert and how she respected him because he was an elder navigating how to build capacity within a new department. Both Francine and Wanda recalled working with Gordon during a tumultuous time as the administration was looking for new leadership for the department.

Four of the six participants mentioned Quinton Roman Nose along with his leadership, which allowed the department to provide more services and opportunities. He was the Executive Director when the gaming revenue allocation plan was passed and allowed for the department

and programs to be provided with supplemental gaming funds. Establishing budgets, policies and procedures, and expansion of services were also completed under his tenure. Quinton is currently the Executive Director of TEDNA and still provides partnership, collaboration, and opportunities to CADOE students and families through grants. Teresa remembered when she was serving as President of Oklahoma Council for Indian Education (OCIE), she received a phone call from Quinton. He gave her the idea to start having a legislative day at the state capital hosted by OCIE. Legislative days continue to be held every year and include educational and tribal leaders. Natalie mentioned how important the TEDNA organization is and how Quinton continues to call her to update her about law, policy, and advocacy opportunities, some of which she is not aware of. Quinton continues to make an impact in Indian education, TEDs/TEAs, and educational leadership. His contributions should be included in the educational history of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. In fact, Alex RedCorn who is supervising this dissertation often credits Quinton for teaching him the ropes in Indigenous education, which then allowed him to develop programming and partnership with Native Nations focused on educational leadership at Kansas State University. After attending one of Alex's presentations at the University of Oklahoma (OU) (Alex credits the invitation to speak at OU to Quinton), I inquired about Kansas State's doctoral program and decided to pursue a doctoral degree. In other words, I might not be working on this dissertation without Quinton's long-achieving impact and network.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to learn how the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education has built capacity and asserted sovereignty through the stories and lived experiences of Cheyenne and Arapaho female educational leaders. This study was informed by and a

continuation of the work of Dr. Henrietta Mann, Cheyenne scholar of Cheyenne and Arapaho Education: 1871-1982. Although this study does not include a specific timeline, the stories that I share include 1983, the year I was born, to the present day.

The participants in this study - Prayer Cloth Woman, Teresa, Dara, Francine, Wanda, and Natalie - provide the context needed to understand where we have been and where we are going in terms of C&A women's leadership and C&A education. All participants shared stories of their experiences as children in either public school or boarding school educational systems, and the impact those systems had on them, both good and bad. This study allowed them to share stories of their journeys as educational leaders in and around the Department of Education. Their educational and professional journeys have taken the participants to Texas, California, Kansas, Montana, and Washington, but all returned home to live and work. Most importantly, they returned to Concho. This study shares how the participants have created systems, pathways, and opportunities for future C&A female educational leaders to move Cheyenne and Arapaho education forward.

To my community, I hope these stories resonate with you and encourage you to look within your families, communities, and tribes to hear their stories. I hope this research generates an interest in Cheyenne and Arapaho education for the next generation. Lastly, I hope the stories shared in this study are valued by current and future C&A woman educational leaders.

As I reflect on my journey as the Executive Director of CADOE and my responsibility to prepare the next generation of C&A female educational leaders... I wonder who will continue to build capacity and assert sovereignty? Who will write the next dissertation? If you are reading

this dissertation and want to come home...back to Concho, to lead, there is a place for you,
because all good roads lead back to Concho.

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